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THE BELOVED ANARCHIST

The story of a
Non-Conforming
Indian Communist

P. R. TAIKAD

A Kalpa Publication

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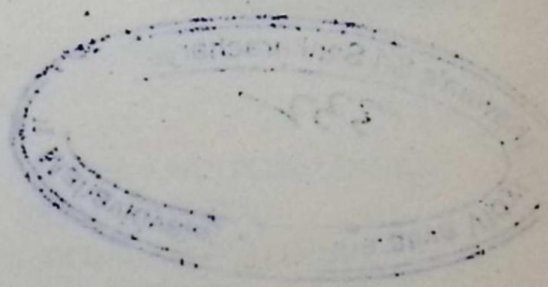

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My father would have been 100 years old if he had been living today. He gave me my love for literature, music and good company, which has sustained me through many difficult years. He was always excited by ideas, and to think, talk and write about them was his most delightful hobby.

This was his great legacy to me, and in acknowledgement, and sharing my joy in remembering him with my brothers and sisters, on the occasion of his birth centenary,

I dedicate this book

TO

MY FATHER

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The years which preceded and followed the second world war threw the world into turmoil. Here is a peep into the life of a new generation which emerged in India, illustrated by a young man and those associated with him trying to find their feet in the new world. The Beloved Anarchist and his partner (in life and politics) are angered by the manner in which they were brought into the Communist party by its talent scouts, but once in it, are attracted by its challenges, and they gradually change from tradition-bound innocents into not only vigilant but ardent votaries of a new anarchist revolution but moving from Communism, backwards from Stalin to Lenin and to Marx, to a proletarian revolution beginning from the proletariat. Says the Beloved Anarchist to his friend: "A pot of milk, my dear, is not boiled by a blow-pipe from the top but a broad fire blazing from below ... Imagine a people's revolution in a country of 400 millions being led by a set of Cabinet Ministers ..."

There is a built-in human note to this philosophy which runs through the book postulated by the Beloved Anarchist thus: "... Communist philosophy is right that way. The heart is a blood-pumping machine and its purpose ends there. I was wise to it all till I met you ... Nor can we be separated without some kind of an emotional surgery which would amputate what is not the pumping machine in the heart."

Albert Camus, when once asked what would be his choice between the revolution and his mother, said without hesitation: "Mother." The Beloved Anarchist answers a similar question in his own way.

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Book I : THE VIRGINS 1

Book II : THE EXPLORERS 72

Book III : THE STAR-GAZERS 142

Book IV : THE REQUIEM 217

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CHAPTER 1

It was a week of dramatic events for Chandru.

He had met his beautiful cousin, Sundari, whom he would marry. Love was a western conception, the kind of love that led to courting, the engagement and then the wedding — and bliss. But here in India, it was not like that. The boy would say 'yes' and the girl would say 'yes' too, not to each other but to their parents.

Anyway, Sundari was his. Their parents wanted it, the sanctification of an old friendship and relationship — they were cousins — through the union of one's son with the other's daughter. And when Chandru saw Sundari, he knew that this convention would in their case have the backing of their love also. It was all written in her eyes, laughing mocking, coaxing, Sundari was indeed Sweet Seventeen. She was a surprise nevertheless, Chandru said to himself. Six years earlier when Sundari and her parents had come on a visit, she had been lean and lanky, but she had always a fair complexion and had beautiful eyes which narrowed enticingly whenever she smiled.

"How you have grown, Chandru !" she had exclaimed when she saw him during their visit. What could he say in reply except stare ? Where did all those curves in her body come from ? Lord, any good artist's first line-drawing of a beautiful shapely woman would fit her. No, not the line-drawing alone. They would not show her beaming sunshine face, those dancing eyes and those smile-lit lips. Some one of his friends had said that a woman without jewellery was more beautiful — "God's own work, dear fellow" — but he would not take his word. Sundari was beautiful with all her jewellery, the diamond drops from the ears, the jingling bangles and the gold necklace.

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Love among young people in the society in which Chandru lived was not declared, but their story was out when Giri, Sundari's young sister, spilled it saying : "Sundari has been doing nothing but planning. 'I must teach that book-worm to waste some time. Otherwise, what will happen to me ?' Sundari tried to shut her up. "Don't be silly, Giri. I never said anything like that". "Ah, now, now, now, don't provoke me, Sundari" said Giri. "I have a basket-full of things to disclose — and remember, worse than this." He heard that exchange and noticed how Sundari was blushing.

What remained now ? Mali uncle would return to Madura and write back conveying the astrologer's okay to the marriage. And then more formal events would follow.

The other event of the week was also dramatic but in a different style and not very pleasant. This was a meeting with the political underground he had, together with his friend Raghu. Perhaps, it was too early to form an opinion. Half of it thrilled him and half of it was confusing and frightening. Should he have listened to his father and broken with Raghu ?

Their fathers were friends and collegues as clerks in the Government Secretariat and the two families lived not far from each other. Raghu and Chandru had grown together from their school days and now they were in the last lap of their university course. But, as the years went by, it seemed to Chandru, Raghu had started drifting. While Chandru stuck to his books and libraries and earned the reward for it by winning an excellent academic record — he had bagged all the prizes and scholarships for as long as he could remember — Raghu's interest had turned to politics. They were nevertheless steadfast friends and Chandru indeed loved to hear Raghu speak about the goings-on in the political world with stories about the big names in the national struggle, Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and others. But Chandru was very sorry about his friend's neglect of his studies. Chandru's father had no good opinion about him and used to warn him about that "Never-do-well".

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But Raghu was a determined fellow. He told Chandru that he had as good as burnt his boats and his life was now at the service of the nation and he did not care what happened to him. Chandru felt sorry, for Raghu was a bright fellow and could do well in his studies if only he had not gone to the wilderness this way. They had arguments between them and Raghu finally said one day : "We have a secret meeting today. You come and see for yourself. If you feel there is a call in it for you, come and join. Otherwise, let us say quits."

For friendship's sake, Chandru went to that meeting. The venue itself was funny, macabre. It was an outhouse garret behind a big lawyer's bungalow. The place, covered by a cluster of trees, was hardly visible outside. Chandru sat with Raghu and a dozen others and some man with a beard, looking like a sage and wearing a long shirt, (a man from Bombay by name Phatke, Chandru learnt later) was haranguing away saying that their battle would not end with driving away the British from India but continue till all their stooges and agents were annihilated. He denounced the big names of the National Congress, Gandhi and others, who had been the heroes of Raghu and Chandru, as being in the pay of Big Business tycoons and landed money-bags. The object of the meeting, the speaker explained, was to recruit talented and partriotic young men for this battle. It was a long and angry oration on the simmering rage of the masses against the tyranny of oppressors. At the end, he disclosed in whispers as a "top secret" that there was going to be a conference in Hyderabad and he hoped that a good contingent would be able to join and take the movement forward.

There were one or two vignettes which lingered in Chandru's mind about this meeting. One was the presence of a professor in his college who had recently joined with a big halo around him. He had come from Oxford, it was said, after many years in England. Chandru had seen him and noted that he was a man of grace and refinement, but he did not have much to do with him as he was in the

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Science faculty while Chandru himself was an Arts Faculty student.

Another, a little odd for him to have noticed it at all, was the intrusion of a servant girl who brought tea in a jug with some glasses. She seemed to be an extraordinarily attractive girl, youth and health giving her a fine figure and he wondered how she was in such company. Raghu looked at Ganesh — he was the lawyer's clerk who lived in the garret and played host for the meeting — and winked. When Chandru queried about it later, Raghu said that she was Ganesh's girl and he lived in daily dread of being discovered by the aweful lawyer and sacked, as the girl was rumoured to be in the "family way". Chandru felt sorry for the pretty girl.

Ganesh himself, Chandru found, was a funny character. He was middle-aged and seemed moody and emotional and, according to Raghu, was in the group because of his "white hot hatred" (Ganesh's own phase) of the big lawyer who, he felt, was "sucking his blood, under-paying and sweating him" and, what was worse, humiliating him all the time in the presence of clients.

These provided the lighter side to the occasion, but did not hide what Chandru regarded as its unpleasant features, primarily its underground character, into which, Chandru thought, even Raghu would not fit in and, secondly, the continuous harping on the need for secrecy. The phrase "even the walls have ears" uttered by the speaker a number of times was still echoing in his mind.

Chandru then and there decided that there was no "call" in it for him, to quote Raghu's own word for it, and told him so as they came out. He told Raghu that they had their M.A. examination coming on in a few months and they had both to concentrate on it. Chandru did not take his friend into confidence about Sundari. That would be his secret for the moment.

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There was no secret about it, however, in his own house. Not only for Chandru and Sundari, but for the entire family, for Chandru's younger brother Cheenu, his sister Charu and their parents, the proposal had brought great joy. Charu was very fond of Sundari and spent all her time with her during their visit. Sundari had a brother, Ramu, who was of the same age as Cheenu, and he had great admiration and affection for Chandru. There were in fact so many bonds which brought them close together. Chandru's father Viswanatha Iyer was "Viswam" to Sundari's father, Mahalingam Iyer, and the latter was "Mali" to the former and the youngsters used to be tickled to hear their parents addressing each other by such boyish pet names.

Social compatibility between the two families came from a certain uneven balance. Sundari's family was rich. But Chandru's out-shone them by the academic brilliance of the younger generation. Mahalingam Iyer came from a family of land-lords. He was in school and college with Chandru's father but discontinued his education to help his aging father to look after their extensive land-holdings. Gradually, he started a "side business" of money-lending which added to the family's already satisfactory situation.

Chandru's was also a happy family — not rich, not poor. His father was always fond of referring to his "steady" job in the Maharaja's government. He became a university graduate, due more to his father's keenness to educate his only son than the latter's aptitude or talents. He then got a job in the government secretariat as a clerk and, by dint of long service, was now a head clerk. He had no complaints. "Ten to five, Sundays free and salary on the First," — that was his formula for a good job. And as for his family, he used to feel that God had compensated for his mediocrity by making his two sons and his daughter brilliant. They had done extremely well, without any effort on his part, and won many prizes and, though he was wise enough not to flaunt it, he was secretly very proud of it.

Everything was fine and Chandru was happy. But

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one little incident was secretly nagging him. When Sundari and her parents were staying with them during their visit and when prospects of the marriage seemed more or less settled, Chandru purchased a fine fountain pen with a gold cap and, attaching a small card to it with the note "To my ever dear Sundari", he kept it in a small velvet bag he had and wanted to hand it to her privately at a convenient moment. But he could never get her alone till the last day when she came into their room to look for something and Chandru gave the present to her. Sundari smiled and clutched it and took it to her bosom and said : "This will never leave me." But, after they had all gone, Chandru found the bag on the window sill. Apparently, in the hurry of looking for what she wanted, she had kept it there and forgot all about it when they all left. Chandru had a shock and felt terribly grieved, but before anyone else could see it, he took it and put it in his trunk. He felt that he should not make much about it since he could always hand it to her when they met again.

Happy events continued to come, for soon after Sundari left, his Principal called him one day to his office. He was surprised as he had never before met this high dignitary. He was greatly embarrassed when the Principal got up when he entered the room, greeted him warmly and bade him sit down.

"Chandrasekhar, you have made me and this college proud", the Principal said. "You may remember the Empire Association's essay competition you wrote four months ago on "International Co-operation among Youth". There were papers from many universities in the country and I am happy that your essay has been adjudged the best. They have sent a prize to be awarded to you in the form of books for Rs. 1000. The Award will be presented to you at a special public function.

"The Award also includes", the Principal added, "a three-month stay in London as a get-together programme with other scholars from the Empire countries. It is also

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stipulated that prize-winners will have an opportunity to join Oxford or Cambridge if the student is otherwise qualified. Since you will be taking your M.A. degree soon, this award will open out a big opportunity for you."

Chandru was elated and excited, for, though he had won prizes in the past, this had come when he could share his joy with Sundari. When he disclosed the news at home, Charu was in transport and his parents were immensely happy. Cheenu said that it was a very big achievement as he had come not only first in his university as hitherto, but in all the universities of the country. His mother immediately went in and brought a brass mug, put some salt and chillies in it and, after asking everyone, ominously, to remain silent, circled it round his head several times and threw it into the fire in the kitchen. This was her ritual to protect him against "evil eyes". When eventually the smoke had subsided, she exclaimed : "See, not a sound ! If no one had cast evil eyes, it would have cracked and made explosive sounds. Dear boy, thank God you are now safe. Sometimes, I wish you don't get so many prizes. Envy is a killer."

That was his mother. She adored and doted on him. He was her eldest son and his birthdays were celebrated with great ceremony with priests to chant *mantras*. Chandru used to be embarrased, but would not protest lest he should hurt his parents. "Are you happy dear boy ?", his mother would ask him every now and then. What gave great joy to him was his mother's words to his father later that evening : 'That Sundari is a beautiful and fine girl and is an excellent match for our Chandru".

There was a big debate, however, about his going to England. His mother declared that she was not happy about it at all. "The poor boy will not get proper food there and they will force him to smoke and drink and eat non-vegetarian food. That is why boys who return from abroad are not accepted in our society". "And," she added wiping her tears with the tip of her saree, "Poor Chandru,

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he is so handsome, those white girls will spoil him. Look at that Judge's son, Parasu. He came back with a white girl. Please don't send him to London".

"Why are you crying like this, Lakshmi ?" his father said. "He is not leaving tomorrow. There are so many formalities like passport, tickets, etc. When the time comes, we shall see. We shall consult people. And never, I tell you, fear that Chandru will go into bad ways. He will never cross our wishes".

Thus it was "God is in his Heaven" for Chandru but not for his poor friend Raghu. One day when Chandru went to his college, some one told him that Raghu's name was on the Notice Board. As this was unusual and knowing Raghu's underground activities, Chandru rushed to see what it was about and was shocked to note that his name had been struck off the rolls for non-attendance in classes and non-payment of fees. Chandru hurried to Raghu's house and heard he had been away for some days. He did not tell Raghu's parents about his suspicions but knew that Raghu had gone on another of his political "missions". He was greatly agitated and decided that he must help out his friend without any loss of time.

He went to his college the very next day and sent a slip to his Principal requesting an interview. Having only lately met him as the winner of the Empire Association Award, the Principal was considerate. Chandru poured out his sentiments about his dear friend and sought a special exemption for Raghu assuring him that he was a bright student and would surely do well if given a chance. The Principal remembered his case and expressed surprise that Chandru was associating with a boy who never attended classes. Eventually, however, he relented and said he would give instructions for Raghu's re-admission on full payment of the arrears of fees.

Chandru was greatly relieved and, as soon as he was able to get at Raghu, he conveyed the news of what had

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happened. Raghu was angry and also sorry that Chandru was meddling in his affairs. Chandru asked him to calm down and think for a moment about the future before him.

"You know, Raghu, I attended that meeting as you wanted. Frankly, I thought, that man sounded crazy," Chandru said. "He wanted us to plunge into something we couldn't understand. The point is, Raghu, we don't want to be stampeded into any course of action without our knowing what it would lead up to. It is unpleasant to feel that we may be pawns in somebody else's game."

"No, Chandru," said Raghavan. "That is a wrong way to look at it. The question here is what *we* want to do. Are we to stick to the beaten track, pass our examinations and secure a job, get married, beget children and grow old ? I think you and I are not made that way. If you begin to see that there is a cause and there is something you can do, then you see you are nobody's pawn. Success or failure in such a mission is something you set for yourself. That is the point."

"Yes, I do see that," Chandru said. "But somehow, I feel I should not get caught in the dark. I have a feeling that the whole matter is taking a turn much deeper than we realize. Anyway, if I have to go into it at all, I would like to know more about it. It is just as well they told us about that meeting in Hyderabad in August. At least, that gives us time to finish our examinations. We don't know what the future may be for us."

"But, my dear chap," replied Raghavan, "I am already out. So far as I am concerned, Chandru, I have burnt my boats. That is final, once and for all".

"Don't say that, Raghu, "Chandru argued. "I feel very bad about it. All I say is, give yourself a chance. We have stuck to each other, rain or shine. Let us see it through."

Raghu ultimately agreed and said he would, just to please Chandru, rejoin college and take the examination.

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"But you have to help me with all notes and books as I have been hopelessly out of touch and any credit or discredit for my performance will go to you."

Between them, they found the money to pay up the fees and then followed an intense coaching session for Raghu and, to give the devil his due, Chandru thought, Raghavan did keep his promise and worked hard. But Raghu made it clear that he was not giving up politics and that he had chosen his path of strife and sacrifice for the country.

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CHAPTER 2

Raghavan was of course the most happy young man in town when the examinations were at last over. He declared that his educational chapter was finished whether he failed or passed. After each examination, like an elder brother, Chandru scanned the question paper with his friend, questioned and cross-questioned him on the answers he had written and was happy that Raghu had done mighty well for his preparation and was sure to pass with credit.

His father had an interesting incident to narrate about Raghu at his post-examination stage. "Ah, I forgot to tell you, Chandru," his father told him one evening. "That Never-do-well came here today. You must see to believe. With an unshaven face, he had got a white cap from somewhere and wearing some coarse loose-fitting, long shirt, he was a sight to see. 'So, you have finished your examination and you are getting ready to go to the devil ?' I asked him and he grinned and said : 'Sir, you don't know how fast the world is changing. I move with the times while you stay where you are. I hope you will give Chandru the freedom he deserves.' I got mad and told him to mind his business and leave you alone. Then he smiled and went away, the fool. I think you have wasted enough time on him, Chandru. Now, let him go to the devil. Nobody can stop him, it seems, You have your career to think of."

Chandru was sorry for his friend but he could not blame his father too. Revolutionaries need not necessarily look like thugs.

It seemed that the Principal of his college was waiting only for the examinations to end to speak to him about the presentation of the Empire Association Award and the steps Chandru had to take to go to London. He knew about the conservative background of Chandru's family and offered to speak to his father if he raised any objection to Chandru going abroad.

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Chandru found that, after years of a quiet humdrum life, he was moving into an exciting era. Not long after his meeting with the Principal, he felt he was being suddenly pushed into the limelight as it were, because the public function arranged for the presentation of the Award seemed to be on a grander scale than he had imagined. It coincided with the valedictory meeting of the College annual term, conventionally called the Annual Day. Compliments were lavished on him by the Principal and the Chief Guest who was the Director of the Education Department.

His friend Raghavan was there and he cheered and hugged Chandru when he came down from the platform with his Award scroll in the silver casket. In the big crowd, he could barely move forward and he slowly walked up to where his father sat. Chandru gave the casket to him when his father slowly got up and blessed him by touching his head with his palm. He could not speak, obviously overwhelmed. His brother Cheenu came, proud and happy. Charu was there glowing with pride and stood holding his hand showing her great affection for him.

Actually, Raghavan was the most embarrassing in the group. He exclaimed loudly : "I can't imagine a more glorious culmination to a most brilliant career." Chandru felt that Raghu was becoming a trifle difficult and, pressing him on the shoulder, whispered : "Quiet, quiet. Don't fall in love with the elite."

Among those who congratulated him warmly, to his considerable surprise, was the Professor who had made an odd figure at the political meeting he had attended with Raghu. Chandru had not expected the Professor to recognise him when, one day in the library, he accosted Chandru and said he was very proud to know him.

"Why don't you come and have tea with me some time?" he told Chandru. "I live close by in a hotel and its only room upstairs is my empire. You will enjoy the view," he added. "We must have a lot of common interests,

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for I am not merely a Chemistry man. I am a keen student of the social sciences like you. Please do come. I would like to be in touch with you."

Chandru was happy and interested. He took an early opportunity to go to the hotel and was thrilled to see the Professor's spacious room covered with books of all kinds and, as he had said, on a wide variety of subjects. He learnt that his name was Aswath Narayan Patwardhan, as he had signed himself on the first inside page of every book there — books purchased in Edinborough, London, Oxford and so on, showing the date on which he had got them and the price : Meticulous, Chandru thought. But the room itself was not well arranged, with books and papers lying heaped on tables and shelves in a disorderly fashion.

Chandru was pleasantly surprised by Prof. Patwardhan's informality and cordiality. He was almost flattering sometimes saying that he had heard of Chandru's "dazzling academic record".

"I have heard you speak too, Chandru," he said, "and feel you have a very bright future. In fact, I came to that meeting that day only to meet you as Mr. Phatke — that is the man who came from Bombay to speak to us — had told me that you would come with Raghavan.

Something rang a bell in Chandru's mind. He remembered in a faint echo Mr. Phatke's words "revolution", "looking for talent", etc. and it was not a happy recollection. But the Professor seemed obviously sincere and nice. In fact, Chandru was rather embarrassed that this eminent-scholar should talk about him in such terms. He seemed a lonely man. Chandru had seen him generally reticent in college and he had very few friends. "May be because I have been abroad so long", Prof. Patwardhan said casually later, "I cannot mix. Many may think I am a snob."

He did not beat about the bush to tell Chandru why

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he had been interested in meeting him. "I have been looking forward to have a chat with you because I want your friendship. I have been lonely here. You may have guessed by now that I have deep political affiliations and commitments. I don't want to hide anything from you."

"I am going to trust you, Chandru, as I have trusted very few people. You will know why, when you have heard me fully. And then, you may decide whether we may go on from there in our association. I don't believe in God. So, I cannot swear, but, believe me, what I am telling you is the truth, the full unvarnished truth".

"Imagine a boy of ten," Dr. Patwardhan began rather dramatically, "witnessing his aged father being whipped by a bully, two of his sisters being pulled by the hair and abducted, his brothers being beaten with lathis and handcuffed and held in chains by policemen, his parents, old and grief-stricken, jumping into a well. That boy was me, Chandru. Thinking of it all now, after so many years, the gruesome tragedy reaches the level of the grotesque. But it was not so at the time, when it was a real blood-curdling business."

While Chandru listened silently, Dr. Patwardhan went on :

"I am the only surviving member of my family which consisted of ten members including my father and mother, six brothers and two sisters. We belonged to a landed middle class family in the Poona district of Bombay Presidency. Ours was a happy family — once upon a time, long long ago, as I told you. I am the only one now left. My father and mother entered into a suicide pact and killed themselves. Two of my sisters were molested and killed. Three brothers lost their lives in a riot. Two were hanged.

"Let me tell you how it all happened.

"For generations, we had lived on land which was a

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part of a Zamindari. It was perfectly natural to the feudal system which laid down a pattern of relationship between the Zamindar, that is, the fuedal lord and his ryots, the peasants. If the Zamindar was a good man, the relationship would be a happy one. Each peasant would go to him once a year, offer presents and a good part of the income from the land which the peasant held under perpetual lease. This was so in fact in our case till the old Zamindar died and his young successor, who had grown up in Bombay city and developed into a tyrant and a bully, succeeded him. Fate then began to chase our simple, honest, hard-working family right down to hell.

"The trouble began when a part of our 40 acres was requisitioned for a railway line and the young Zamindar pocketted the compensation money. When the railway put up a station, the Zamindar decided to build his "Palace" nearby and another ten acres of our land were swallowed up without even a word of courtesy to us. Our family was now reduced to poverty, but my brothers were hardy peasants and they carried on with what they had by growing vegetables and selling them once a week in a shandy a few miles away.

But the final catastrophe came from an entirely new direction. Like all ill-bred young men who had suddenly come into wealth, the young Zamindar's weakness was a sense of excessive virility. He had three wives (whom he called 'Ranis' or 'queens') including an Anglo-Indian white woman whom he was proud to display but that was not enough for him. When he saw my two young sisters full of good health, they caught his fancy. He began to tease them. When he found the peasant family "fussy over their virtue" he decided to "teach them a lesson" (which was a favourite phrase with him). The land was sold to a European company without any reference to our elders who had held it for generations. We knew of it only when a Revenue Officer came with policemen to ask us to move away. My father and brothers protested with their documents and

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narrated the misdeeds of the young Zamindar about which they had told no one till then.

"The answer to this came the next day when the young Zamindar turned up with a number of his servants. They brought his horse-drawn landau and the Zamindar himself was on horse-back. He came with a whip and when we came out of our hut, the man drew his whip and gave a lash at my father's face. Blinded by pain, my father stumbled and my mother rushed up to him.

"All this I remember as if it happened yesterday. The Zamindar with flaming eyes rode up to my father shouting, "You dog, did you tell the Revenue man that I had taken away your land — *your* land? Don't you know that you are my cattle — by bloody slaves eating out of my mercy? I shall teach you a lesson, he said, and raised his whip again. Then my brothers went up and held his hand. One of them caught the horse by the bridle and it reared and he fell to the ground. His men rushed up to him raining blows with their sticks on my brothers.

"Teach the dogs a lesson," shouted the Zamindar. 'Catch hold of the girls' he roared and they ran and caught hold of my sisters. By then, it was an all-out fight between my five brothers and the Zamindar's men who were a score or more. My sisters shrieking and fighting, were dragged by their hair to the landau and, on the Zamindar's orders, the horses set off at a gallop. Injured and bleeding, my brothers ran behind, beaten and mocked at by the Zamindar's servants, till they fell.

"That is all I remember. It was much later from one of the Zamindar's men I learnt that there was a big fight in the Zamindar's palace. My sisters had been molested and killed. Two of my brothers were shot dead by the Zamindar and one of my brothers rushed up to him and cut him down with the Zamindar's own sword. This brave brother was later mortally injured in the struggle. The two who were left ran back to our house to attend to our parents.

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They had hardly reached home when the police came and took them away charging them with rioting and murder.

Crying hoarse with grief, my father shouted to them to take me also with them and, while they waited, he dragged my mother and ran to the backyard, pushed her into our big well and himself jumped after her. My brothers in hand-cuff and chains were shocked and tried to break loose while the police, themselves shocked, held them. They finally took me away with them with my brothers raving and fighting violently until they were beaten down unconscious.

"They were taken, I was told, to the Poona jail and in the face of 'overwhelming evidence' (the poor had no chance against the rich in those days, even in the Courts) for rioting and killing the Zamindar, were sentenced to death and hanged.

"Can you believe, Chandru, that this was my beginning when you see me now in my present sophisticated, academic environment?" He resumed after a few minutes. "I am not a philosopher and don't believe in the so called divine or human law of compensation. But what followed was really a story of resurrection and redemption.

Chandru found this part of the Professor's narrative as incredible as the ghastly story he had heard. With the Europeans who had come to take over the land for the factory had come an elderly Scottish priest who, hearing the story of the panic-stricken, speechless young lad (which Patwardhan was at the time) offered to take him as a page boy. He took him to England and first put him in a school in Edinburgh. Patwardhan did so well at School that he found his way to Oxford where he lived for nine years, first studying and later teaching there. And finally, "when dear old Father Pearson died in India which was his regular field of work, he left me all he had, £ 2,000. He was my second father."

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Dr. Patwardhan left no gap in his story and before he ended explained how he became a Communist.

"Those were the days of the Fabian movement in England and I became a dedicated disciple. Slowly, in the course of years, the truth and significance of all that had happened to my family became clear to me. My new associations did not help me in Oxford and, in the typical British style, I was slowly eased out. The members of the Russian revolution were still inspiring every one in those days and, eventually, I became a member of the Communist party underground. During one of my visits to Moscow, I was told that I should go to India and live in obscurity in some corner of the country till the time came for the Party to 'act'. I was told that there were a number of others like me. There was a contact for us in Bombay and he would be the channel of our communication.

"That in brief is my story and I have told it to you as starkly as the events took their course. I know, Chandru, you will not betray me though it is never the practice of any of us to take outsiders into confidence. But I have done so because we want you with us. If you decide against it, it is up to you. But we want you. Our mission is a great one and, in its organisation, you are not an Indian. You are one of a fraternity spread over the entire globe all over with a great revolution simmering. You may start as an insignificant tail-ender but you will not be so for long, for, in our circle we judge people. You fit into the pattern. I don't know how far you will go in the hierarchy of our revolutionary group, but you are the stuff that leaders are made of. Please keep in mind all I have said and give some thought to them. Let me know at your convenience whether we are going to gain or lose you."

As the Professor concluded, Chandru was too stunned to speak. Dr. Patwardhan had spoken for nearly two hours omitting no detail, however gory, but never, not even once, had he raised his voice. Chandru could not but wonder

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how this suave polished scholar had this burning cauldron of fire hidden in his mind. He assured the Professor that his secret would be safe with him.

The atmosphere was heavy and it was obvious that both of them would prefer to be alone. Chandru gently took leave of him.

Chandru walked home thoughtfully. Such were the men, he supposed, who were at the root of revolutions. Dr. Patwardhan's story drew him to only one conclusion. The bloody tragedy was incidental and was not apparently uncommon in those days. What it signified was that the malady lay not in the few who ruled but in the system which was just no good.

Chandru did not tell Raghu about this little drama, even though they met more than once that week. Some days later, he thought that it would be a nice gesture if he called on Dr. Patwardhan again. He had, however, a feeling somehow that he should be careful with this man who seemed to have so much secret ire — and malice ? — in his heart.

Prof. Patwardhan was his normal self this time and apologised for his emotional outburst of the other day. He said his loneliness overcame him sometimes and there was hardly anyone in this place he could talk to. He had some friends in Bombay. Some were party workers but very few of them knew his personal story.

He showed Chandru some of the articles and monographs he was writing and asked him whether he would help in regard to one which he regarded as particularly important. He said this would be presented to the Hyderabad meeting and asked Chandru whether he would like to attend it. "You will see many interesting people there."

Chandru felt diffident to undertake such a serious work. But the Professor assured him that he had a lot of material

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and Chandru had only to collate them and write the thesis which, Dr. Patwardhan was confident, Chandru could easily do and well.

"You can work at Ganesh's place," Dr. Patwardhan suggested. "I have left some useful reference books and documents there and the place is ideal for quiet work. Ganesh goes to the lawyer's office in the morning and returns only late in the night."

Chandru welcomed the idea as, with Raghu coming in now and then and also the excitement of the coming marriage, there would be lots of distraction at the house. He would consult Ganesh.

But Chandru did not know that he had bad news awaiting him at home. He found his mother sitting with a heavy face and his father lying quietly in his enormous cane easy chair.

"We have had a letter from your uncle Mali," his mother said "The astrologer has said that the horoscopes do not match."

Chandru was shocked by the news and did not know how to react. But, in a flash, he realized that it would be grossly improper for him to show his feelings because marriages were arranged by elders and it would be bad manners for a young man to show his preference for this girl or that, especially if the match had broken off.

"Amma," Chandru said at last collecting himself. "I am very much relieved. You know, with the I.C.S. examination coming off this year, I felt you should wait. But naturally I could not tell you since you and father may have been hurt. I have told father, however, that we were not in the old days when boys and girls were married at ten and twelve. A young man has to find a job and settle down before getting married."

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His father said nothing and Charu merely looked at him and said : "Ramu has also written to Cheenu about it. Only, he has abused astrologers and had argued with his father, it seems, to ignore them. But Mali uncle said they could not ignore astrological advice."

"Mali is right," Chandru's father said. "Astrologers are our guide in such matters, though, in every other way, this is an ideal match. I am sure Mali is as much disappointed as we are. As Chandru said, after all, why should we be in a hurry ?"

His mother burst into tears. "Sundari is such a beautiful girl and an ideal match for Chandru. I was longing..... longing so much. How unkind is God..... But I did tell that, when alliances were considered between families who were related, astrologers need not be consulted. But who cares for what I say ?"

There was no use talking further about it, his father argued, and added that there was certainly no harm in delaying Chandru's marriage till the I.C.S. examination was over.

Cheenu and Chandru shared a room and both of them were silent though full of their own thoughts.

"Ramu writes that Sundari is inconsolable", Cheenu said at last.

"What is the use" Chandru parried. "Nobody does that in our society, you know, though I do think it is funny. Only one per cent of one per cent of one per cent ad infinitum of the world's population decides the fate of two young people this way. Let us forget it, Cheenu. Perhaps, I was hasty and I also took things for granted. That is probably because we have felt that Sundari has always belonged to us, isn't it ? We have all loved her. Look at the way Charu weeps. Let us forget it, Cheenu. Sundari will get a good husband."

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CHAPTER 3

Chandru was restless. He was not one of those determind young men who hit out and fought their battles. He was as much sorry for Sundari as for himself. He could not even tell her that he would love her as long as he lived, not only as his cousin but as Sundari, the girl he loved. The next day when no one was present, he took out the gift he had got for her, felt it in the velvet bag and told himself, here was a sad symbol which would be with him now for ever.

His world had become suddenly gloomy. The big Award and the much-discussed London trip now seemed to have lost their charm. But, in another sense, he would like to go. He could get away, far, far away, so that he could forget Sundari. But then, his parents, Cheenu and his dear Charu, how could he leave them ?

Hell : What havoc stupid astrologers caused :

The atmosphere in the house was heavy, but nothing was said. In the evening, the prospects of his going to England came up for discussion when they were at dinner.

"Amma," he told his mother, "I do agree that it is a new thing for us. We have been fortunate enough to stick to this place and to this nice house, but you know how families have been uprooted and forced to go to distant places. After all, my going to London is a well-arranged, well-organised plan under excellent auspices.

"Changes are inevitable and we have to accept them. Was life the same when you married, when father went to school and college ? Who had heard of London in those days ? Now, every year, four or five boys are going to London after passing the I.C.S. examination. There are others going for higher studies, like Parasu, but not to bring

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white girls as he did. There are Indian boys in London who take the I.C.S. examination there and come to India.

"On the other hand, what about those people like Gandhi and Nehru and a whole lot of others, Barristers who came back to India and became fighters against the British? In fact, they are the biggest critics of the British and you know how many of them went to jail recently. I don't say I will go against your wishes or hurt you or father in any way. But you have to reckon with changes and circumstances beyond our control. You don't know the kind of books we read. We are flooded with new books and new ideas. We, young people, react to them. Have I been a bad son to you? No, you know that. But then, you don't know that all the time things are happening to me, to my mind, because of the books I read, the people I meet and the circumstances in which I grow and, may be too, my experiences, about which of course I don't talk much. They are all there. The world is shrinking. I am amazed quite often at the fantastic changes which have been taking place from one generation to another. Don't I belong to a new generation? And won't I be affected by these changes? I am getting on to twenty-two and, with all the years before me, can I expect that all these years are going to be the same as they were for you and father?"

That was a lecture for a man who had never spoken at such length and he felt self-conscious. It was almost pompous and he began to feel as if he had mounted a platform. His mother laughed.

"The kind of things you say, Chandru! Don't I know all that?" she said. "I believe in God and you are my son and I know you will never cross our wishes. Nor do I think, will we stand in your way. Let us believe that God will guide us."

His father must have said 'amen' to all this gracious exchange of ideas and faith in the family, but what Chandru

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Nani is her only daughter and her husband left her soon after Nani was born — a good-for-nothing man, it seems. Then she had what we call an adventurous life until she came here five or six years ago. Now she got another husband and she simply told Nani one day to look after herself and walked off with her man. What do you think of that? But this girl, don't you make a mistake, can well take care of herself. The big man's chaffeur, quite an elderly fellow with a number of children, tried some stunts and the girl straight went and complained to the big Boss. Lord, what a scene there was, Chandru : The girl said she would quit unless she was accommodated in the big bungalow itself. Then, the lady of the house — she doesn't want to lose Nani, an excellent servant who works hard, never grumbles and is thoroughly honest besides being a neat, smiling girl. Chandru, have you seen her at close quarters? The d-d- girl is prettier than a princess but she takes an enormous amount of pains not to show it because of the wolves around. Why, the big lady of the house, certainly knew her value. She came out and shouted for the whole town to hear : 'Nani *shall* stay in her room. Let me see who dares to go near her. I shall get him hanged in public.'

"That was all. The car driver was a meek man from then on and the other menials too had their warning and Nani was left alone. She went about with her chin in the air.

"I must say this has not affected me. Once, when we met by chance, I asked her whether she could help me keep my room clean because I was getting some guests — that was before we started our meetings. She agreed and, as you see, she has been a marvellous help. She is like that. When she does something, she does it so well, no one can improve on it. That is how she began actually to look after my house — and me. No one was wise about our ripening friendship and companionship and, before long, she began sleeping in my room. I only play with her, Chandru, really. She is a little kid and doesn't know things.

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"I have only filled the gaps for you about the facts since you made some comments and probably heard a thing or two from friends. She tells me now that she is with child though I don't know how. She is scared but I have told her I would marry her if it comes to a push. That is really what keeps her going, poor thing. You may have noticed she is quite cheerful now, though every time she goes to the house, the old lady, it seems, stares at her and one of these days will hold her up to tell the truth. Then, Chandru, tell me what will happen to me. I am having sleepless nights, I wish she gets away."

Chandru was not happy as the story came to an end. He did not say anything but he was really very sorry for the girl — a dashing young thing with that figure of hers which presumably she inherited from her mother as Ganesh had said. Nothing this cranky man could say or do would make that young girl forgive him. With those thoughts, Chandru spoke out : "Having done something you should not have, as a man of the world, you should restore her self-respect to this fine girl. You must marry her."

"Don't underestimate these girls, Chandru", Ganesh replied. "They know what they are doing. I won't be surpprised if that girl deliberately wanted to marry me and get a home for herself."

The talk with Ganesh did not cheer him up, but with his projected trip abroad, he decided that the best course for him would be to complete all he had to do in India before his departure. While in Ganesh's house, as days went by, once in a while when he had a glimpse of Nani — wonderful girl that, with dark lotus eyes and a shapely body — he would wonder what a contrast this girl was to his Sundari. Sundari was fair and tall, always a jingle of gold about her and her laughter and chatter, a blend of pleasant noises and an aroma of freshness, a wealth of a girl ! And here was this poor servant girl, an unclean, supposed-to-be white cloth rolled round from waist down

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and not low enough to reach her ankles which, therefore, left uncovered a part of her fine healthy legs, a tight blouse for the upper part which could hardly contain her contours, a light brown complexion made dark by the mixture of sweat and oil which always seemed to linger on her face — a feast of course of animal flesh, which often enough made Chandru stare at her curiously. He was also touched by a sense of pity because of the story Ganesh had told about her.

Such passing thoughts were not strong enough to distract him from his work, but often came crowding in, in a mixture of sad, depressing, confusing emotions. Perhaps, it was precisely to prevent such emotional entanglements that traditional marriages in his community were *arranged* (most wickedly ordained, as was done in his case, by astrologers who matched two sets of untested, uncertain astrological formulae rather than two human beings in flesh and blood) and wrapped up in rituals and the priests told you on what date and at what time you should get on to your nuptial bed — so that the human factor was kept rigidly out of account in the fulfilment of what the *Vedas* prescribed as the duty of one generation to another ! Try to figure out where love entered in this social frame-work ! His mind was making a fool of him with romantic stories and poems which had no relation to real life.

The routine in Ganesh's house was, however, a pleasant one. From the very first day, Chandru found the room swept and cleaned, the only small rickety table Ganesh had, placed near the window giving some light. Must be the work of that girl Nani, Chandru noted. The days were uneventful but not dull.

The formal printed invitation for Sundari's marriage followed and Chandru noted that 'Rajaraman' was the name — the man who would be her husband. There was no surprise about this invitation as it was expected, but the very next day, Chandru did have a surprise. He had gone

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to the College library and the Librarian who knew him well (Chandru had been a student member of the Library Committee) gave him a letter received two days earlier. He saw that it was the same invitation card they had got at home, but on the reverse it contained a note. It was in Sundari's hand and said : "Dear brother Chandru, please pray for me. Your ever and ever loving S."

Chandru was greatly moved and, to indicate to her that her secret note had reached him, he wrote a brief letter to her saying that he was happy to see the invitation and he would pray for her happiness, ever and ever. That should make it clear that he had received her note.

Chandru felt on reflection that Sundari had written to him because she intended that he should not come to Madras. She probably felt that she would not be able to hide her feelings if he were around. So, when the family finalised plans for the journey to Madras, he said that he could not come since he had to cncentrate on his I.C.S. examination and also, one of his professors had sought his assistance to write a monograph. His parents reluctantly agreed, but Charu kept on pressing him until one day, she looked at his sad face when she was arguing and never mentioned the subject again.

With his parents away, Chandru settled down to a state of mental stability, until, suddenly one day, all the shock and sadness came back when he remembered that it was Sundari's wedding day. He could not shake his mind off her. He began to picturise all the scenes of the wedding, stage by stage. First, Sundari dressed up as a bride in a glittering saree and wearing all her jewellery, which her father had given her in plenty, would be led to where the bridegroom would wait for her. They would exchange flower garlands and hold hands, then the chanting of *mantras* and rituals and then her father would formally "gift" her to the young man placing her hands in his. The crowd would shower flower petals and the pipes would play the crescendo with all the drums beating in unison.

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"Seared in heart and lone and blighted,
Worse than this I scarce can die,"

he muttered to himself. His Sundari would not ever be Sundari Chandrasekharan but Sundari Rajaraman.

He sat in his chair with legs on the table for a long, long time. Then he got out of his house and walked aimlessly and spent some time in the beautiful gardens of the Museum. It was late when he went to his hotel and, after lunch, dragged himself to Ganesh's place.

His practice was to work at the old table on which he had spread all his papers and notes. But that day, his mind refused to bend. He could not concentrate. He thought that he would sit on the floor, cross legged like Ganesh, keep the papers on his lap and write, just as Ganesh would do often.

He pulled up Ganesh's rolled-up mat, spread it on the floor against the wall and sat down. He placed his files and books all around him and began. But this kind of what Chandru felt to be a 'comfortable' posture did not help the work. It only brought lethargy and, before long, he lay down and very soon was asleep.

He did not know how long he had slept and woke up with a start when he heard the door open with a creak. It was not the front door but the one at the back. Peering through the half-open door was Nani.

"What do you want? Why are you here?" he asked his voice thick after the sleep.

"Nothing, sir," she said. "I saw through the crack in the door you were not sitting at the desk. Yet I found the front door bolted, so I came in to see whether Master Ganesh had come back. Usually, he is not here at this time and so, not finding you at your usual place, I wanted to see who was here".

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BVBSSMV

332

"Oh, it is all right. I just dozed off," Chandru said. "I had a heavy meal. I thought I would sit down on the floor and work like Ganesh, but sleep overcame me. What is this?" he broke off suddenly. "You say you see me working at the desk every day. Is this a good thing to do, Nani?"

"It is wrong, sir," she said. "I am sorry, I shall not do this again."

"No, don't misunderstand me, girl," Chandru said hastily, not wanting to hurt her. "I am not angry, but you know it is a wrong thing to do, like staring at people behind their back".

"But you do stare at me behind my back, sir, quite often. I know that," Nani said good humouredly.

"My word, you *are* a naughty girl, Nani," Chandru exclaimed. "How the deuce do you know that?"

"Well, sir, we know. We women know," Nani said smiling softly. "I have caught you many a time doing it, but you know you are a big man, sir, big and rich. What could I say?"

"What do you mean, big and rich? I am neither big nor rich. Do I behave like that towards anyone?"

"No, sir, you don't" she replied. "That is why I let you have your game. You don't mind, sir, if I chose to be silent, knowing this?"

"Well, well, Nani, I don't know what to say except that you are as clever as you are good-looking."

"You think I am good-looking, sir" Nani asked and Chandru felt as if he had been caught on the wrong foot.

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"You should not be asking questions to me, Nani, like this", Chandru said in a friendly tone. "If you want to know the truth, I was looking at you now and then, yes. That was because I was sorry for you."

"Why do you feel sorry for me, Sir, ? Nani asked with genuine curiosity. "Do I look as if I am unhappy ? I am quite happy, sir. Everyone is kind to me here and some trouble I had I got over and I am now quite happy."

"Yes, today you look quite happy. You are dressed up too, very much unlike your usual self, with new clothes and the half-saree which you seldom wear. In fact, you look very bright and that is what perhaps made me refer to you as good-looking."

"Well, sir, I had my bath and went to the temple in the morning and, after returning, I had no time to change and went for work in my new dress. The madame at home also commented on it. The fact is, sir, today is my birth-day. I am eighteen today."

Chandru looked at her with a lot of sympathy in his eyes. "The poor girl is so happy, he thought to himself. "Yet, how unhappy she is going to be when she knows the ugly truth."

"Nani, may God bless you," he said. "And may God always keep you happy."

Nani bowed her head in acknowledgement and then slowly murmered. "I will be happy, sir. I will be happy always. It heartens me, sir, you noticed me today, talked to me and gave me your good wishes. This is really a happy birthday for me. I am very honest, sir, and I don't speak any untruth. Why did you, if I may ask, why did you say you were sorry for me ?"

"Poor girl, you don't know in what great trouble you are. Ganesh and I are good friends and he has told me

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everything. In fact, I advised him to marry you. If he does not, I shall force him. I don't like dishonest people, I feel they are unclean. So, if you are in trouble, I shall force him to marry you."

"But I won't marry him, sir," she said a trifle annoyed. "I may tell you sir, truthfully, I am not in trouble as you say."

"What do you mean? You understand what I mean by trouble?"

"I understand quite well and I mean what I say. I am not going to get a child. No, sir, I am not in trouble. God bless you nevertheless, for worrying about me."

"But Ganesh told me and he says he is all the time worrying about it," Chandru said.

"I have told him a lie, sir, to frighten him. I am sorry, sir, you force me to tell all this. We have sometimes to tell a lie to save ourselves — I mean, girls like me. The fact is I told him a lie to keep him away."

"This is very interesting," commented Chandru. "The poor fellow is worrying his head off. Why do you do this to him?"

"We shouldn't be talking about such things, sir. You talk to me now, but you will be angry later if I speak more about this."

"Come, come, Nani" Chandru said laughing. "If you can tell me this much, you can tell me more."

"Promise, sir, that you will not be angry and then I will tell you," she said.

"All right, I promise," Chandru said staring at this sweet, pert girl.

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"I don't like him, sir, and he troubles me a lot," Nani explained. "So, I told him, and he is terribly frightened about a scandal. Do you think, sir, I can go about as lightly as I do, if I am really going to have a child ?"

"But he told me that the lady of the house might discover your trouble any day," Chandru said in surprise.

"Everything I told him to scare him away," Nani said quietly.

"But he is now preparing to marry you," Chandru exclaimed.

"Marry me ! Me to marry this old man ? I shall never marry him," Nani said spiritedly. "We shouldn't be talking about all this, sir."

"You are right, Nani, it is not correct. But Ganesh says you sleep here every night in this room."

"That is correct, sir," Nani said. "I do, but he doesn't touch me. I have told him I would scream if he came near me."

"This is all very strange," Chandru argued. "He tells me he has you all the time," Chandru persisted.

"No, sir, he has me at no time, never. I sleep here because I am afraid there are one or two young people hereabouts who may slip into my room at night. That is why. Not because I like him. I hate him in fact."

"Why are you so bitter ?" Chandru asked quite concerned.

"He is a crank, sir, and does not know what a girl wants. Besides you force me to tell you — I am sorry, sir — he is a pervert."

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Chandru felt that it was time to end the conversation.

He was surprised, however, when Nani looked around for a moment and suddenly put her arms round him and hugged him saying : "This is what I want and this is whom I want."

She was not smelling of sweat and oil, but of sandalwood and flowers. She was all over him in a few minutes. Chandru never knew what it was to be with a woman before. He knew it now. After it was all over, Nani quickly put on her clothes and ran away.

Chandru lay there for several minutes, his palms crossed behind to rest his head. He was thinking of that servant girl and did not know whether to pity or admire her. For some one, more or less illiterate, with hardly any knowledge of the world, barely 18, he could not understand how cleverly she could dodge Ganesh and the rest of them but got to him in a manner which he did not think was deliberate yet deft enough to give credit to a very designing mature woman. She could be what any one would have called her, a bad girl, but he did not think so.

As for himself, he felt a little amused. He could never, never, have imagined that such an adventure could come his way. Normally, for his nature and his social background with which he was fully identified, he should have felt ashamed. But, call him an angry man or a sad man, he was now in such a state of depression, he was simply apathetic to whatever happened. Till now, his life was as if drawn by a ruler and he was a good boy by every standard of the times. His parents, his teachers from school to college, his friends, all loved and respected him. There was no trifling with Chandrasekhar. He was serious without being ridiculous and too decent a soul to be misunderstood.

So, with approval from all sides, his academic record won for Chandru not only a merit prize in the academic

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world but also one for good conduct. Now that harmony had been spoilt by a jarring note. Not that anyone else would know about it, but, to himself and in his own mind, his latest experience had left a scar. The thought upset him, but he answered his mind's question mark by saying that, while Sundari's memory would remain indelible with its own compelling endurance, he had developed a strange regard for this girl. She was poor, she was helpless, she was intelligent, she was pretty and obviously she had adopted him as her man. In any case, he should have a talk with this girl and find out more about her. In view of what had happened, he felt he owed it to her and to himself.

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CHAPTER 5

Chandru was too conscientious not to give primary importance to his work on the professor's monograph, but Nani was on his thoughts almost all the time. When he went to Ganesh's place the next day, Chandru took his seat at his desk in business-like fashion and was amused to find that, in her eagerness to be of help, Nani had tidied up his table, and, in the process, mixed and messed up his papers thoroughly.

Normally, he would have been annoyed but Nani's face of the previous day was dancing in his mind and he patiently collected and put them back in order. He read portions he had drafted to make sure that the document was academic and factual without interpretative political comment. The aim was to analyse available economic data showing the ratio of capital to labour employed, side by side with profits and wages. The study was extended to several industries and also plantations.

He was indeed impressed by the manner in which the professor (or whoever did it) had collected all this massive data and wondered what the sources were. Though some gaps did exist, the available material was comprehensive enough to establish the general thesis which was that labour was being sweated and British capital investments were paying more dividends than was generally known. The documents also listed the more prominent names and institutions detailing the role of the Indian capitalists and technicians who served the foreign interests. It was easy to see that the material could be exploited for anti-government propaganda by political agitators. Chandru felt that this might be only one of the monographs of this type to be presented at the Hyderabad conference. Even purely from an academic point of view, Chandru felt that the Hyderabad conference should be interesting.

He heard Nani opening the bolt of her door and, soon

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after, she came and stood on the threshold. She was again dressed in her fresh white clothes though her face looked tired after the morning chores.

"I came to say I am very sorry, sir," she said in a half-whisper. "I lost my wits which I do not normally do. I beseech you humbly to forgive me."

"Don't say all that, Nani," said Chandru smiling. "We all have our moods. To tell you the truth, I was myself in a most depressed state of mind. I like you. I do like you very much, Nani. But there is such a big gap between us. You know you should be on your guard. You are a poor girl and in a hasty relationship, you will be the sufferer."

"I know it very well, sir, but....." she stopped.

"Yes, go on," Chandru said.

"My mother has given me a warning, sir," she again said in a very low tone.

"My mother said, 'look girl, there is every chance of your getting into trouble. You are very much like me and I know to my cost what it is for a poor girl to have good looks. You were born when I was younger than you. I lost my mother when I was very young and grew up with my sisters and they were married. They used to fuss over me very much. Only later, I knew why. They were afraid that their husbands, rough hands of the rice fields near the riverside township where we lived, would get hold of me. So they gave me in marriage to the first young man who came that way. He had no job and lived with his father who kept some cows and sold milk. He took me away and that was how I had you. Life became hell after his father died because he sold all the cows and, before long, we had nothing to live on — and one day he was not to be seen.

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"Don't make me say all this, sir. What I say is I understand what you mean. I will be careful."

"No, no, Nani, tell me about your mother," Chandru said. "What happened later ?"

"Later, sir, it seemed she had many men going to her," Nani continued, "and I was with her. She had no place where she could stay. She would stay with one man for some time and then leave him and it seems I was always in the way. My mother, however, loved me very much and took great care of me. Finally, she married an old man who too was poor but he gave her a home. I passed my IV Form with good marks in the local high school and was in Form V when the old man died and we had to quit the house. Then, my mother came here. She was only 30 years old at that time and I was thirteen.

"She told me her story, sir, one day before she left here with her new husband. That was more than a year ago. She was drying my hair after my bath and we were sitting near the door when someone whistled. She came in and shut the door. She suddenly embraced me and cried "How can I leave you, child ?" she said. 'Why should you leave me ?' I asked and she replied : 'I am going to have a new husband and he won't want you and I don't also want to have you around.'

"My child, she said, you are all that a man can desire. And then, she told me things — you know, sir, about man and woman and all that, and how girls became pregnant. She said, 'Don't yield to temptations. You don't know how a man can corrupt a simple girl. What you should do is to choose a man who will stick to you and then you stick to him. Never leave him. Give him everything you can and hold him."

Chandru heard her half in sorrow and half in curiosity. In her narrative, Nani seemed to sharpen all the tragedy of her mother's farewell advice to her.

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"But not long after she left, you got on to Ganesh, didn't you ?" Chandru asked good humouredly.

"You are right, sir, in a way," she replied, her voice slightly raised. "I was greatly bothered by many people hereabouts. You cannot know, sir, and perhaps you will not also believe. I used to shed tears behind closed doors and thought of suicide. Then I thought of my mother's experience and decided I would not suffer like her. After all, I was not uneducated and I made bold to speak to the big lawyer himself directly and he and the madame sympathised with me and came to my rescue. I felt that this was not enough. So, knowingly and deliberately, I got on to Ganesh Master. Forgive me, sir, if I tell you, he was easy prey. After my mother's advice, I knew how to take care of myself and you can imagine the rest. I have already told you about him."

"Nani," Chandru said pretending to speak in a serious tone, "Since you appear to have been well trained, is it possible you have been playing the same game with me ?"

She closed her face with her palms and cried. "God forgive me, sir, I was very, very wrong. But please, please believe me. I am a helpless, poor girl, you should not make me say shameful things."

"What shameful things ? Can words be more shameful than actions ?"

"I do not mean that way, sir," Nani replied. "The fact is, in truth, the fact is, how can I say, sir ? You are so high born and I am here so low and poor. The fact is, sir, from the day I saw you, I have been praying to God. That is all I can say, sir. You must understand. I am not a bad girl. I am not. I care for no one else. Whatever you do to me and wherever you may be, there will be only you in my heart. I am not a weak girl. I can assure you. If anyone else comes in my way, I can take care of myself."

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Chandru was puzzled at this confession. More than this a girl in her position could not speak about what obviously was her expression of love.

He looked at her tired face. She had apparently taken some trouble to make herself presentable.

"You have told me your story, Nani," he began in a thinking aloud tone. "I shall tell you mine."

"I wanted to marry a girl whom I have known since childhood and she is now married to some one else. Yesterday was her wedding day."

"You need not marry me, sir, but I will be faithful to you," Nani said.

Chandru got up and embraced her. "You certainly have a way about you....." When he said that Nani ceased to be a servant and became a woman.

Nani lingered on for a long time sitting on the floor near him while he sat in the chair looking and smiling at her.

"Poor and low-caste you may be, Nani," he said slowly. "You are beautiful. I cannot marry you, however, because I do not want to get into a mess with my family and probably mess up your life too. But I shall take care of you. But, for heaven's sake, don't come here when I work. I find I am unable to resist you. Keep away, both for your own good and mine. Let me work out some plan."

With characteristic thoroughness, Chandru worked out the details of how he would help her. The next day he gave her some money to buy some dresses saying, "I don't want you to come to me every time wearing the same dress." He told her that she should find a private tutor, from a nearby school and, having come up to very near the school-leaving stage, she could pick up the threads and might one

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day even think of going to a college. He said he had some savings of his own from his scholarship and prize moneys and that would come in handy for the moment. And finally, he told her : "Remember, Nani, from now on, you will be a pure woman. Right ?"

'You will see, sir," she said and touched his feet with both her hands and then touched her eyes. That was her humble gesture of a grateful salutation. Then she ran to her room.

Chandru had no doubt that he had now a problem on his hands. He felt that it would not be wrong if he did not attach much importance to his physical relationship with her. They were both young after all and such incidents were not uncommon—provided of course there was no social consequence. But Nani somehow seemed different. She was intelligent, tactful and determined. He was inclined to believe her when she said that she would not accept any other man in her life. It was not only a promise but also an appeal that he should accept her.

At home that night, Chandru's mind was in a state of agitation. He felt that he was bound by honour to accept Nani but what would Sundari think — and his parents and his dear Charu ? Into what complexities his sentiments towards her would push him seemed a frightening prospect. He had become an outcaste with his own people. And this girl, a menial washing utensils and sweeping floors, earning six Rupees a month with food, with nothing perhaps other than her beautiful god-given body — she had no existence in society. What would she be for him but a burden ? However sincerely he might accept her she would wilt under public ostracism day in and day out. Indeed, he would also shock the world — the brightest boy in town plumbing for a waif !

For the moment, it seemed amusing to think of the two women with whom he was in love, for it was not only

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Sundari who had charmed him but this poor girl had also won his love. What a story, he thought.

Yes, he repeated to himself, a story ; He would write a story. The theme quickly took shape in his mind. Sundari would be in it and Nani too with their roles reversed. As an author he thought he was like God. He could do anything.

Suddenly, the thought occurred to him whether he was finding a solution to his own problem. Sundari, if only she knew the circumstances, may have asked him to stand by Nani. Chandru had one extraordinary quality which stood him well in such circumstances. He would not act. He would only react. So, he would wait for something to happen and then he would react.

In the meanwhile, Chandru's short story found its way to a Bombay journal and he received an encouraging letter from the Editor. He smiled to himself — Nani had made him a story writer ! He followed with two more short stories on local themes. He decided to keep this money in a bank in a joint account, in his and Nani's name.

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CHAPTER 6

Chandru had three jobs with Dr. Patwardhan. One was to report on the progress of the monograph. The second, to probe to the extent possible the political undertones of such studies and their association with the Hyderabad conference. Also, now that his London programmes were getting finalised, to get some idea of the academic and social life in Britain.

On most of these topics, Dr. Patwardhan met him halfway though not always making the interludes pleasant. For instance, he opened the discussion on the monograph by saying that, not having seen Chandru for some days, he had gone to Ganesh's house himself and had found the room locked. Chandru told him that the drafting of the monograph was now over. He had, therefore, not much work there. Only the statistical tables had to be inserted and this could be done at the final stage of typing. "I have tried to follow your instructions carefully. It has been an interesting exercise. You can revise it and amend it where necessary."

The Professor smiled and saying "That is excellent," continued : "When I was there wondering where you were, there was some girl who seemed to be on police duty watching the room from the back of the bungalow. When I turned, I had a glimpse of her but she disappeared — a veritable Venus in copper."

"That must be the servant girl who helps Ganesh," Chandru said lightly.

"I thought so," Prof. Patwardhan said. "But this girl seemed strikingly good-looking though clearly a servant girl in her make-up. As I told you, I had a bare glimpse of her. What a proprietorial air ! Was she around when you were working there ? She seemed to stare as if she owned the place.

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"I think she keeps Ganesh's room tidy for him and he pays her something," Chandru said. "That is what he told me once."

The Professor laughed loudly : "The Chaste Huntress! If that girl were around....."

He stopped noticing the sudden change of colour on Chandru's face.

Chandru looked at him in undisguised anger. What was he hinting at ? Slurring him or Nani ? He said with a slight stutter :

"I am sorry, sir. I don't know what to say. You are a great sympathiser for the plight of the poor. For all one can know, her only fault perhaps is that she is a servant, for such comments cannot come, even from you, if an upper class female of such a striking appearance as you say, were the person concerned. The poor are not entitled to virtue, it would seem."

"Soft, soft, Chandru," Dr. Patwardhan patted him on the back in a friendly way and bade Chandru sit down again since he had stood up in his agitation. "You are very right. It is wrong to make light comments like that. But, dear boy, I am becoming convinced that you are unfit for our company. You are an idealist, we are revolutionaries. You are a bourgeois, we are Marxists. What does a girl mean to us ? She is one of us. There is no propriety between a man and a woman. A man is a man and a woman is a woman. In our concept of humanism, there is total uninhibited freedom for man and woman — the same tasks, the same means, the same goals. She is a woman equal to any man, not a labourer who hires her services — not a servant girl, but a girl. You have much to learn, dear Chandru."

"What you say is very interesting to me," Chandru said. "Only I cannot make out whether we are discussing

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a person or generalities. In any case, let us leave that poor girl alone."

"I do not know whether you would like this monograph to be so long," Chandru continued, abruptly changing the subject. "It has come to about a hundred pages and, with all the tables, it may come to much more, though in print it may be only about fifty pages."

"That will be excellent, the right length for a monograph," Prof. Patwardhan said.

Again, it was Dr. Patwardhan who opened the subject of the London trip. "What does your Principal say about your going abroad? They may not allow you to go if they know the work you have been doing."

"What work have I been doing, sir?" Chandru asked in surprise. "What I have been working on is a thesis — a simple socio-economic study in relation to investment, employment and profits."

"In the eyes of an imperial power, these are the ingredients of sinister dynamite sticks," the Professor cut in. "Look here, Chandru, such monographs educate and instruct our workers about what we are working for, what we are fighting for, for which we call on them to make sacrifices."

"Just now, we were discussing that poor girl and you were all pity for her. I admire you — I have always admired you, Chandru — but think for a moment why you should pity that girl. I pity you for being a member of a society which takes a girl out of her human personality and makes her a servant, not a girl! If you put this down on paper, say in a monograph, it is treason, my dear fellow, it is preaching class war."

Chandru regarded the Professor's argument as fallacious. He thought Dr. Patwardhan was twisting facts to suit his purpose.

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"I do not think so, sir," Chandru said. "There is nothing objectionable in this monograph. Thinking politicians in Britain are writing about the same problem. There are laws in America against cartels and monopolies. Congress politicians in India are shouting from the roof-tops about the imperialist exploitation of India. These are the facts, the data, if one may call them so, which form the basis for the agitation for freedom, economic equality, labour rights, etc. This is a battle which has gone on for over a century in most civilised countries of the world."

"Well, Chandru, let us leave it there for the present. Whether you go to London or stay back, whether you join the I.C.S. or turn to politics, you will understand the truth of what I have said ultimately," Prof. Patwardhan said.

"I would welcome you to Hyderabad, Chandru," he continued, "because you will see aired there a cross-section of ideas on this subject. You have a lively, powerful mind, you have an intellect that has to be marshalled to good causes and you have a fervour and sincerity which makes for dedication. You have weaknesses, but you will get over them, yes, indeed I hope so. Please come to Hyderabad, dear Chandru, and give a chance to yourself."

Chandru did not know what to say. He said haltingly: "After what you tell me, the discussions there should be really interesting."

"What about London then?" queried the Professor.

"I find I may have to leave any day, sir," Chandru said. "In fact, I wanted to talk to you about that and get some guidance."

"What do you expect to see and do in London?" Dr. Patwardhan asked.

"I shall tell you, sir," Chandru said. "I am greatly excited because, with all my English education, I feel drawn

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to England as some kind of a beautiful, glorious and legendary country. I think often of the British Parliament and other British institutions, the men and women, who by some understandable talent, influenced, if not controlled, a vast part of the globe.

"I think I shall spend a useful time there. Everyone seems to take it for granted that I would enter the I.C.S. Well, I may, for all I can see."

"That is one way to look at it, Chandru," Dr. Patwardhan said. "As I said before, it all depends on your attitude, whether that is what you want. With your great talents, it will be a tragedy if you are lost to this country. As I told you, it is my great hope that you will join the big movement we are all dreaming about.

"How much more work have you on the monograph ?" Dr. Patwardhan asked.

"It is practically over," Chandru said. "But I would like to write it out again neatly, so that it becomes, what shall I say, the finished product."

"You have done a marvellous job any way," the Professor said. "You have really worked very hard. How many hours are you there ?"

"No, sir, it has not been hard going really. It has been an interesting exercise as I said. I work for about five hours in the afternoon, which is not very hard work. In the forenoons, I work in my house."

They parted cordially with the Professor once again wishing him luck, adding : "If your plans change, please try to come to Hyderabad."

Chandru had not seen Raghu for some time and, as it was a holiday and getting on to dusk, he thought he would

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take a chance and see whether he was at Ganesh's place with the political crowd assembling there generally on Sundays. Raghu was there and, as usual, he was firing away his views on political issues with a lot of hot stuff on leaders beginning from Gandhi down to the new-comers in the Congress. He was not dressed as a national leader-in-the-making with a white cap and a long shirt going down to the knee which ill-suited him. Raghavan was by no means an unintelligent fellow and, if he took a little care about his appearance, he would look smart. But he was always unkempt to proclaim his "reevolutionary" personality.

Raghavan sprang up to greet Chandru affectionately and declared that they could now have some sound comments on the situation. Chandru laughed loudly and told him and Ganesh and one or two others who were there, that he had to bow to Raghavan on political 'isms', for he had no definite views nor could he state his views, such as they were, as categorically as Raghavan could.

"I wonder what he would have made of himself if he was born in Bengal," Chandru said. "That is the home of revolutionaries and the boys in the Punjab involved in terrorist activities were all inspired by the terrorists of Bengal. Raghavan rightly belongs to this great cradle of Indian terrorism."

"Judging by his oratory," Ganesh intervened, "for two hours, he has been telling us who should be hanged and who should be shot and how, if everyone were to act according to his plan, the British could be made to quit in 24 hours. But, he was saying that, you, Chandru, were restraining him. But for that cold-feet Chandru, he has been saying, he would have launched out by now.

Raghavan blinked as Chandru turned to him, his eyes wide in dismay that Ganesh should betray him about the loose words he had uttered.

"You are quoting me out of context," he stormed at Ganesh, "I was referring to our delay due to the exams.

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What I meant by cold-feet was just a joke, you know how. Don't make me ungracious, please. I may feel in my heart of hearts I may have enlisted for the revolutionary army but for Chandru persuading me to finish the exams. Was it out of fear that you drew me away from this?" he asked Chandru.

"Well, you may call it that. I do confess to cold-feet now and then, especially in regard to you, Raghu. I do care what you are going to make of yourself and I don't want failure to appear in your university record at the beginning of your career. May I add, for what it is worth. I heard somebody saying not long ago that young firebrands, who rant a great deal about revolutions, do not make good revolutionaries at all. They end up, it was said, being disciplined members of a staid society."

'I have news for you friends," Chandru continued. "I am going to London. The Principal has informed me that, when the necessary formalities are completed, I shall have to go to Bombay and take a boat from there."

"That means you are out," Raghavan said. "But I assure you, Chandru, our revolution will not stop."

"I shall be out of India in any case," Chandru said. "And I am afraid, Raghu, till I go, I am going to stick to you. If you want to blow up trains, wait till I leave. In the meanwhile, I would like to collect the books and notes I have given you. I may need them."

Raghavan had cooled down by this time, partly by the news of the impending departure of his friend and partly from the change of subject to matters of practical and immediate importance.

With the heat of politics now over, Ganesh took the floor to speak about his own miseries and declared that, like Chandru, others too might leave and he would have to live out his tragic life.

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CHAPTER 7

Events continued to crowd round Chandru. The M.A. results which came soon after, provided an unexpected surprise. Chandru topped the list as expected and no one was surprised about it. But Raghu's name appearing among the First Classes was a near shock.

Raghu was naturally greatly excited. When Chandru went to his house with the news, Raghu shouted waving the newspaper in his hand : "I have made it. I can't believe it, but I have made it".

Chandru watched this extraordinary enthusiasm with some amusement. This, from a man who had pooh-poohed examinations ! Alas Revolution, Chandru said to himself.

"I had written well as I told Chandru," Raghu continued, buoyant with the excitement of his success. "Of course, Chandru's notes helped."

"Oh no, Raghu," Chandru said. "The credit is all yours. And now, the goal is the I.C.S."

Suddenly, Raghu calmed down. "If you want me to appear for the I.C.S." he said, "you will have to help me. But if you are going abroad, how will this be possible ?"

"No, Raghu," Chandru said. He was cynical. "Why! If I go, you must welcome it. A somewhat dangerous competitor disappears. You must remember, they take only three or four people every year in the Delhi I.C.S. examination and I shall certainly not be happy if I am in your way."

"You are probably right, Chandru," Raghavan said thoughtfully. "You will not be a loser too if you go to London since you can take the I.C.S. there. But, I hope, before you leave, you will give me all your books and notes."

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"I am not leaving yet, Raghu, and I hope we will be in touch, though you may not need my help much now."

"Oh, no, dear Chandru, for Heaven's sake, please don't say that. I am really in a quandary. I don't know which will be better for me — your continuing here or going abroad."

Chandru was shocked and sorry that his success in M.A. had turned the poor fellow's head. Some days later, when Raghu turned up at his house, he looked a changed man. He had not Chandru's chiselled features, height and his good health, but he was all spruced up with his hair cut, face clean shaven showing that care had been taken to give his person an air of distinction. "Hallo, Raghu!" Chandru exclaimed, "You are becoming a Prince charming. Applying for the films?"

"Chandru," Raghu replied solemnly, "we seem to be becoming two contradictory temperaments. When I was very light-hearted, you seemed to be morose. Now, I am serious, you are becoming gay. We are growing up, Chandru. After all, you have to remember that. And mind you, for the I.C.S., between ourselves, people say we have to cultivate a demeanour. You know what I mean. It is not only the academic quality but demeanour, that is the only word for it."

"But, I am not writing the I.C.S.," Chandru replied. "You have told me not to compete, remember, Raghu? How can I write and spoil your chances?"

"You have not taken that seriously, dear fellow," Raghu said warming up. "You have to have your chance and it will be grossly unfair on my part to stop you. My Lord, I will never do it. But are you serious, Chandru?"

"Dead serious," Chandru said. "My mind is all on the trip to London. In any case, I shall not be making a sacrifice for you, Raghu, for I can take the I.C.S. in London."

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"Perfectly right, Chandru," exclaimed Raghu. "You will come first in the Empire. They may keep you in U.K. itself."

"But I don't want to become an Englishman, Raghu" argued Chandru. "What are you wishing for me? What about the toiling masses in India? When you leave them, should I not take charge?"

"Don't tease me, Chandru," Raghu pleaded. "You know I have been very immature. Until you put me in the way, I thought I would never take a degree. Now that you have given the taste of a good life, I want it. I think all my old ways were immature and foolish."

"I am glad you have come out of it, Raghu," Chandru commented. "But immaturity is a quality which has a tendency to persist. It has numerous manifestations. I hope you will not end up by becoming an imperialist, Raghu. That will also be immature, you know."

Then Chandru asked him about his preparations and they outlined a scheme of study.

"Chandru, I have to ask you something seriously — in case you leave," Raghu said after a pause. "Your notes and books, will you give them to me?"

"You *are* becoming smart," Chandru said laughing. "I have given you a lot of my notes — the work of years of hard work. I shall have to have them back in fact before I leave. If I leave, Raghu, all these will be handed over to my brother Cheenu. You will have to get them from him, use them and return them to him. You are developing a one-track mind. Spare me, chum, I believe in helping all, you as well as others."

Raghu could not understand Chandru's somewhat complex phraseology and kept silent. On that, the two

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friends parted, Chandru having registered shock at the manner in which Raghu had turned into a thoroughly self-centered man. He was sorry for him.

All the sweetness and light for Chandru during these days came from Nani. He found her intelligent, charming, gracious and physically most compelling. Her joy in seeing him seemed infectious.

One day, when he went to Ganesh's house, Nani told him that there had been a burglary. He was shocked. A burglary, in Ganesh's place ! Impossible to believe. "What happened ? Tell me, Nani," Chandru said in alarm.

She had been working in the bungalow, she said, and when she came to her room at lunch time, she found that Ganesh's room had been broken into and there was general evidence of burglars searching for valuables. Papers had been thrown about and she was going to arrange them when two strangers came in. "I was about to faint in fear," she said, "when they hurriedly assured me that they would not do anything to me if I told them where the valuables were kept."

"Valuables ?" she had asked in amazement and then explained : "This is a very, very poor man's house, sir. He is a clerk of the lawyer."

"Where does he work ?" one of them had asked.

"He is always with the Vakil, sir. He works in the bungalow and then he goes to court with him," she had said. 'Then what are these papers ?' he asked. "I told them that they belonged to you. They asked me whether you were the student. I didn't know and I could not tell them. But I said you were always working here with the books. They had a look at some of the papers and saying that there were no valuables, they left."

"What silly thieves !" Chandru exclaimed. "To come

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to Ganesh's place of all places." He told her that, if thereafter anyone came in Ganesh's absence, she should avoid talking to them. These hooligans might turn violent and that would not be good for her. She should stick to her room or run away quietly to the big bungalow.

In the meanwhile, his parents had been writing the most loving letters to him describing Sundari's marriage in great detail. He learnt that her husband was a bright young man who had passed his M.A. with distinction in the previous year. The family was extraordinarily rich, many times richer than Mali uncle, according to Charu. "Rajaraman is not tall like you, Anna, or as fair in complexion but an air of prosperity gives him a distinction. His father wants him to enter the family business, but Sundari tells me privately, she is goading him to go for the I.C.S. like you. It seems she has told him all about you."

His parents and Cheenu and Charu had been away now for more than two months and, from their letters, he gathered, their return would be further delayed as they wanted to visit some relatives on their way back at different places and it might be another month before they came back. Since the college was closed for the vacation, Cheenu and Charu could well have an extended holiday. His father wrote that his mother had seen some "decent boys" for Charu and they might pursue the issue of her marriage in due course. Charu, who was writing long letters, kept him informed about Sundari and Rajaraman — and Chandru was embarrassed when she wrote once that Rajaraman had asked Charu : "I would like to meet Chandru. Sundari has been speaking so much about him. Please ask him to come and spend some time with us in Madras. We may have a lot of things which may interest us both, as I am also keen to appear for the I.C.S. My father wants me to look after his business. I think I can write the I.C.S. only if I manage to get away to London somehow."

Charu inquired how his preparations were going for the I.C.S. But, before he could reply, Chandru came to know

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of a development which fired the final salvo to shoot him out of his orbit into unknown space. One day, his Principal sent for him and conveyed to him the shocking news that the British Empire Association had sent a cable to him that, on advice from the Government of India, the invitation to Chandru to go to London had been withdrawn and the Government of India had been requested to nominate another name in his place.

The Principal said he was astounded since he had never heard of anything like this in the past. And they had given no reason ! He felt terribly sorry for Chandru, for, in every way, he had deserved the honour and had won it in an open competition.

"I do not know what is to be done, Chandrasekhar", the Principal (who always called him by his full name) said : "I am bewildered."

Chandru was dazed. He felt as if he was falling down a precipice. He looked at the Principal for a moment in dismay but quickly pulled himself up and, after a pause, told him : "This has been a terrible shock, sir. But I do not want to come to any hasty conclusion. One point strikes me as significant. If the Government of India has instructed the withdrawal of the invitation, obviously, they have something against me. This is not bypassing me but rejecting me. So, there is not much doubt that they would also not allow my admission into the I.C.S. even if I pass the examination. I cannot imagine why."

"I am amazed," the Principal said with great sorrow. "It is in my power, however, to offer you a Lecturer's post in the College, but it will be a bad bargain for you. You must manage to go abroad somehow. Let me see. I shall try to find the reason why this happened."

Chandru did not want to communicate this news to anyone and stuck to his house for a few days.. The three

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short stories he had sent to the Bombay journal had been published and he deposited the money he received, as he had planned, in Nani's account. He was greatly encouraged by the fact that one of the Editors had suggested that Chandru, with his excellent academic background, might attempt some articles on general topics. He decided to take advantage of this advice and wrote a series of articles based on the data of the monograph he had completed, not quoting very much from it but building on the conclusions not elaborated in the pamphlet. He was most delighted when the letter of acceptance came from the Editor. If nothing else, it seemed to him, there was at least this field open to him.

It occurred to him that he could also attempt a book based on the material he had been working on for Dr. Patwardhan's monograph. Whatever he could not use in the manuscript, he could now elaborate and, with interpretation and comments, he should be able to expand it into a book. In fact, he had felt it would make a very topical book since the country was engaged in a massive struggle for independence and the nation's leaders were trying to show how essential it was for the imperial power to go, to prevent the continued exploitation of national resources.

Once he started writing, Chandru found that it was easy to expand the various points touched in the monograph. By the time he decided to approach a big publisher of nationalist books in Calcutta and prepared a synopsis to be sent to them, his manuscript was almost ready in a draft form. Soon after he heard in reply from the publisher welcoming the project, Chandru got the book ready and sent it to them. The arrangement for payment was also generous to Chandru (for a new author as he was) in that he would be paid Rs. 2000 on the approval of the Mss. and another Rs. 2000 on the publication of the book.

His drooping spirits began to revive. A sense of relief brought the thought of Nani whom he had not seen for some days. He wanted her now and wished to take her

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into confidence. Although he had finished his work with the Professor, the key to the room Ganesh had given him was still with him.

He was taken aback as he opened the door. The room had not been swept and everything was in chaos. What happened ? Where was Nani ? Had Ganesh gone away ? She should have come to her room now after her day's work in the bungalow.

He quietly went to her room and gently tapped on the door. He thought there was no response and was about to turn back when he heard some movement. The bolt was drawn and the door opened. He was shocked by what he saw.

Nani stood there, her hair flowing all over her, her face in a fever, eyes red and watering. She could hardly stand. She had hastily drawn some cloth across her body to cover herself as she got up from a mat on which she had been lying. Her room, small and dingy though it was, was kept characteristically well-arranged — the clothing carefully folded and hung from some kind of a wooden stand. There was a small stool in a corner on which she kept some books which showed she had been studying.

She looked at him and burst into tears. Her body was hot with fever. He led her to the mat and she slid down. He placed his palm on her forehead and gently asked :

"You have fever, Nani ?"

She looked at him with sad eyes and whispered : "I am most sorry, sir, I am lying like this when you are here."

He stroked her head and asked again :

"How long have you been ill ?"

"Three days," she said.

"Who has been helping you ?" he asked.

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"Who can help me, sir ? Till yesterday evening, I was going to the bungalow for work. Today, I could not move out. Madame knows. She asked me last night not to work. I don't know where to go for medicines. I have never been ill. I prayed to God for you, sir. I wanted you to come and God brought you."

Chandru was moved and said that, now that he had come, he would look after her. He caressed her cheeks, took her hand in his and said : "I am not leaving you, Nani, till you are all right."

She turned her face away from him to hide her sobs. She was too ill to speak and she could not control herself from breaking into tears again.

"Now, Nani, let us get to work. After all, you have done so much work to keep our room clean. Tell me, can I make some tea ?"

"I made some rice *Kanji* in the morning, sir. That is enough. I have no sugar though I have some tea. My mother left a kerosene stove for me, but I am afraid there is very little kerosene, sir."

Chandru bit his lips and remained silent. "Nani, I gave you some money. Could you not buy some kerosene ?"

"That money I have kept for books, sir," she murmered. "How could I spend it for kerosene ?"

"You fool," he said sadly. "These are primary needs. It doesn't matter. I shall light the stove and see and warm up some *kanji* if possible. Then I shall go and get some medicine for you."

"No sir, please," she said. "People will talk. Your name, sir, your good name. They will blame me. I can't bear it."

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"Don't go on like that," he checked her. "It is not a sin to help some one who is sick."

He then warmed up the gruel in her mud vessel and gave it to her in an aluminium tumbler she had. He asked for particulars of her illness and, asking her not to move, he left locking Ganesh's room as usual.

He ran to his house, got some money and rushed to a popular doctor near where Ganesh lived and reported the symptoms to him. The doctor said that there was a three-day fever raging in the town and gave some medicine.

It was nearly dusk when Chandru returned. He was now greatly relieved of his anxiety and told Nani that she should be all right in a day or two, but the doctor had advised rest. It was only then he remembered he had not had any lunch and went to his hotel.

When he returned Ganesh had come. He wondered why Chandru was there at that hour. Chandru quietly closed the door and began : "You know, Ganesh, Nani's illness..."

Ganesh became pale. Chandru told him that some one should look after her. "Save me, Chandru, please save me. I shall never go near that girl again."

The poor man did not ask what Nani's illness was, presuming that she was going to have an abortion. When Chandru told him that some one had to be with her, Ganesh appealed to Chandru not to put this burden on him.

Chandru tip-toed to Nani's room. She had gone to sleep after taking the mixture. Chandru looked at her face glowing softly under the light of the kerosene lamp he had lit and said to himself : "Nani. sweet girl, you have won me — not a servant girl, but a girl, as Dr. Patwardhan said."

Just as the doctor had said, Nani recovered in two days and when she reported for duty at the bungalow, the Madame

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was struck with pity over her weak condition, and asked her to take two more days' rest. Chandru arranged for food from the hotel and he was with her till she was fully all right.

When Chandru went there again after a few days, he found that Nani's vitality had been such that she was her old self again, blooming and lusty, adorable and desirable. There were no inhibitions between them any more and Nani surrendered herself responding to him.

She told him that she had made considerable progress in her studies, but she had a problem. This was how she disclosed to Chandru she was going to get a child.

Chandru stared at her to see if there was any concern in her face. He did not find any. On the contrary, what he saw was joy and pride. Chandru embraced her and told her that there was no point any more in hiding their relationship and he would disclose the truth to his parents. He was surprised at her reaction. She said she would not meet him again if he had any such idea. "I worship you, sir," she said, "and I shall have no harm or unhappiness come to you. I want your love and, to me, in my heart, you are my husband. But I shall die if I lose you. If our secret is known, our society is such that, at some stage or other, you may be made to regret. Please, please, therefore, if you have some kindness for me, please promise that you will not inform your parents and make them miserable and endanger our relationship. If God wills and, if I become worthy of you, you will marry me and not till then."

So far as her present problem was concerned, Nani told him that she would send for her mother and take her help. Chandru advised her to tell her the facts, but Nani replied : "You don't know her. She can set the town on fire. I shall never tell her about you, but she loves me and I know she will help me."

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Then she told Chandru not to try to meet her, but leave a note behind a portrait in Ganesh's room and they could thus communicate with each other.

That was their last meeting in their home town. It was many months before they met again.

When his parents returned, Chandru did not want to hide from them what the Principal had told him about the withdrawal of the Empire Association's invitation and his decision not to take up the I.C.S. because of the changed circumstances.

"I think God guides us," That was his mother's reaction. "Speaking for myself, Chandru," she said, "I did not want you to go to England. I do not mind if you are anywhere else, but it must be in India. That is all."

That night when the family gathered at dinner, Charu suddenly asked : "Are you sorry, Anna, you are not going for the I.C.S. ?"

"Yes, Charu," Chandru replied frankly. "Yes, I am sorry, in a way. You see if I had myself dropped out for any reason, I would not have minded, but now, I feel I am pushed out — it is not a happy thought."

"You see, I am also a little angry," Chandru continued. "What have I done ? I am not told that. Suddenly, my going to England is stopped. Why ? I am not told. Then they say, the Government of India has something against me. What does this mean ? If the Government of India is against me, I will not be admitted into the I.C.S. too. It is obvious. It all sums up to one simple fact. I have some secret enemies who are determined to spoil my future. That thought upsets me, Charu. Otherwise, I don't mind. All those people who have attained eminence in India are not I.C.S. men, don't you know ?"

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"Life is so complex, father," he said turning to his father. "Sometimes, I feel that, just when we think we are losing, we may be winning. When we think all is fine, we get a blow on the head. When you think all is lost, some one shows the way out."

Chandru decided that his going to Hyderabad now seemed to be the only natural step forward. He met Dr. Patwardhan the next day and told him that he would accompany him to Hyderabad. He did not take him into confidence about the withdrawal of the invitation. But the Professor told him that they could not go together as it was a secret conference. Chandru was again reminded of the air of conspiracy but it was now too late to withdraw.

Actually, he had not much time to think now. He had not met Nani after his parents returned. Nani had informed him in a letter earlier that her mother was first angry and then sorry and later curious and wanted to know who her young man was. Nani had told her that he was a brilliant young man from a very respectable family, but, if the secret was known, all her dreams of a happy future would come to an end. Even about her marriage, Nani had told her, she need not worry as everything would be set right at the end.

He had now barely a week to proceed to Hyderabad and he was anxious to meet her and take leave of her. More than everything he was anxious about arrangements to be made. He went to Ganesh's place hoping that Nani might somehow manage to meet him, but he was disappointed. He heard some conversation behind her door and she must have known that he was there, but did not want to take the risk of meeting him. But, sure enough, behind the portrait, there was a longish note :

"To her noble master from his humble slave Nani :

I don't like to shed tears when you are going away. They say it is not good, but I am unable to control myself.

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My mother does not know you and does not suspect also, but she wants to meet my child's father. I have already told you that I have put her mind at ease by asserting that you have a great future, but everything must be kept secret now. As you know, she is a very practical person and is now thinking, what next ? I have told her that you would make arrangements and let me know. She is a little nervous and says we must go to the hospital. I promise I shall take care of myself. Don't worry on my account. Go and come back with a free mind and I hope you will be happy to see me when you return. You may leave your letter in the same place. Thinking of you always and praying for your safety — your adoring slave Nani."

Chandru was deeply touched. Nani did not believe in paragraphing and there were numerous mistakes in spelling and grammar, but she had expressed her sentiments well and it was an excellent job for a girl who, just a few months ago, was sweeping and scrubbing.

It was clear to him now that it might be difficult for him to meet her before he left, but he had work to do. First, he had to find out a small house to which they could move. Then, he had to arrange with a doctor in case she required medical help. He had also to leave some money for her and arrange to correspond with her, though he could not imagine how this would be possible without help from someone else. And he had to communicate all he had done to her.

Finding a house was not as difficult as he had imagined. Not far from the Women and Children's hospital where he hoped to make arrangements for her confinement, he found a two-room apartment above a shop. Chandru did not know at the time that this was the neighbourhood where Nani's new friend, the teacher, also lived and, if Chandru had planned to help Nani's education, he could not have chosen a more convenient house. The rent was only Rs. 15 per month plus electric and water charges. Chandru thought

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that it would be better if the tenancy was fixed by Nani's mother herself since Nani had decided that his identity should not be disclosed.

He went to the Bank and found that there was a reserve of nearly four hundred Rupees in the account. He felt that this would be adequate for the present, but he would make arrangements in the hospital for her. He was puzzled about how he could do this. That was not a young man's job. But the senior doctor in charge was a women, who had come recently from abroad, and he decided to make a frontal appeal to her for help.

An amiable Christian woman in her late thirties, she received Chandru at her house one morning when he poured out his long story and his connection with Nani. Won over by his honesty and, to a great degree, by his courage to tell the truth, she looked at Chandru with surprise and sympathy and assured him first and foremost that his secret would be safe with her and, wherever he went, he need not be under any nervousness that Nani's mystery would blow up in his absence. She asked him to send Nani with her mother to the hospital and meet her personally. She would do the needful. He gave one hundred Rupees to cover her fees and expenses. She said that the Government hospital was free for the poor and Nani would be exempt from any charge. But, in case, some unexpected expenses became necessary, she would utilise the money and she would hand over the balance to the girl. She was not going to take any charges for her own service.

She kept Chandru in conversation and elicited from him particulars of his family and his plans for the future. Her friendliness was so touching that Chandru spoke to her without any reservation and he told her about Sundari, the only person to whom Chandru had spoken on the subject. He told her frankly that he felt like a man who had lost roots and he did not know what the future had in store for him. Dr. (Miss) Manuel told him he was still a young man

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and his life was only beginning and just because the orthodox plans for a bright young man like him had misfired, it did not mean that his life had come to an end. She told him that he could trust her as a friend and she would help him, for, to her mind, he had done the right thing by Nani and there was nothing for him to regret.

The doctor also solved his problem of communicating with Nani. "You can write to her to my address and, as she will be meeting me, I shall give her your letters. She can give me her letters to you and I shall get them posted."

Two days later, Chandru wrote a brief letter to Nani explaining all he had done and asking her to meet Dr. Manuel personally. He also advised them to move to the new house without delay. He advised her not to disclose particulars of her bank account to anyone and she could keep all connected papers and her cheque book with Dr. Manuel.

What remained for him to do now was to wind up his own affairs at home. He instructed Cheenu to get back the notes and books given to Raghavan when he had done with them. He explained where he had kept his various records to Cheenu and Charu. He wanted them to keep safe for him a box in which he had kept some of his own valued personal possessions. He did not tell them about the present for Sundari he had kept hidden in the velvet bag.

That far, things had gone well. Now, he had to convey his ideas about the future to his parents. He had to put matters to them in such a way that they were not merely reconciled to the situation but saw in it prospects enough to feel that Chandru had lost nothing because of the recent developments.

Some days before he was due to leave, he found an occasion when they were all together after dinner. Chandru gently steered the conversation to the unfortunate incidents of the last few weeks so as to lead them eventually to a line

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of optimism. He pointed out that so many disappointments had come all in a cluster that they were no doubt despondent. Just six months ago, they had expected that he would marry Sundari, would go to London on a scholarship which carried money with prestige and a starry future, and he would eventually come into the I.C.S. But all these hopes were dashed to the ground one after another, in a stunning blow after blow. In fact, he said, the tragedy appeared to be so complete that they were miserable.

He looked at his father's face and he saw that it was filled with sorrow. He had put it with that crude, blunt stark brutality, without any attempt to soften the blow.

"You are right, my boy. I didn't want to say it, but it should not hurt and break your heart," his father said with great pain in his voice. Charu bit her lip to control her grief. His mother sat with her eyes closed.

"No, Appa, I am not hurt, I don't look at it that way," Chandru said. "I have too good a record for my future to be blasted away into nothing. No, I do not have the feeling that all is lost. Only, I have been forced out from a known path to an unknown one. The question now is whether we cling to what we have lost or look with an open mind on what may come. It is obvious that I am not now set on the beaten track. Name, fame, wealth, achievement, whatever I am destined to get, must come from some other direction.

"During the last few months, my mind has been exercised on the big national movement that has been going on. We have been far away from it. In fact, we, as a class, have been opposed to it because — let us look at it for a moment — it is a fight against the established government, the established order and established conventions. I have been looking at this struggle. Many great national leaders, rich men, eminent lawyers, great scholars, philosophers, men like Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and his

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son Jawaharlal, who was educated in England and grew up like an Englishman, are all involved in it. Are we, I ask you, entitled to say that they are all wrong, unwise and dishonest ?

"I don't know whether you understand. I am not sure and cannot assert that they are wholly right. But now that the conventional gates to a career are closed to me, I am going to explore this unknown terrain. What comes of this I cannot tell. But only remember that the world outside is not what we have thought it to be, seeing it from within the limits of our horizon bounded by this small town and the laws laid down by this closed society. If I enter that area, how will it be ? I am uncertain. I have been caught in a situation from which I have to seek a way out. I have to do that myself. If I have your understanding, whatever others may say, whatever anyone else may say, I can launch into this adventure with hope and confidence. Otherwise, my battle will become harder."

"You are right, my son," his father said. "The most unexpected things have happened. You have always done well. You have always been right. I don't think we should blame you. And, as you say, if we know, you will not do anything wrong, even if you don't conform always to what we, with our limited experience and in our small world, imagine is the only right thing, I think we should not blame you.

"I am only worried about one thing, Chandru," his father added. "If your life takes you away from us, will it open a gap between us ? Will our lives be the same again ? It is too much for me to think. It takes time for people like us to accustom ourselves to changes, but since we have absolute faith in you, we shall try. But please keep us in mind."

There was something plaintive about this appeal. Was he already taking leave of them ? Since he had spoken

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so much, though there was not much immediate relevance to their momentary preoccupations, his parents perhaps felt that he was speaking to them about the uncertainties of the future. So be it, he concluded.

Thereafter, they had no serious talk in the family about his future plans. Chandru gave them a good part of the money which came from his articles and told them that further remittances from the newspapers would be sent to them. He had already arranged for all moneys from the Calcutta publishers to go to his father.

He had received a much smaller amount for the stories from the Bombay magazine, but since he had asked for advance payment, he could not grumble. This he credited to Nani's account in her bank.

Chandru decided to meet his Principal once again and take leave of him. He had not seen him after that day when he disclosed with great sorrow the Empire Association's decision. Chandru told him that he had been working out various plans having decided that, once the Government of India had any objection to him, he had no chance of being taken into the I.C.S. He was grateful to him for his offer of a post in the College, but wondered whether the Principal himself might be embarrassed by recruiting a man against whom the Government had discovered some objection. "In the circumstances, sir, I thought I might try my hand at writing. I may do some light writing in the newspapers and might also attempt some serious books. This should be rewarding career for me, if not in terms of money, at least in terms of my desire for self-expression. I have already approached some journals and they have been encouraging."

"Chandrasekhar, I need not tell you specially, you have not only my best wishes but the good wishes of all the Professors who have known you. You have not only an unblemished but an admirable record here. But I want to ask you : Have you any enemies ?"

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Chandru expressed surprise and said that except that he surmised that in view of what had happened, he might have some secret enemies, he had always been overwhelmed by love and goodwill from every side.

"Well," the Principal said. "You have some powerful enemies. I made inquiries about your sad case of my friend in the British Political Agent's office here and I gather that, on some anonymous communication to the Government of India, some place where you were working was inspected by the C.I.D. and they found some communist literature. As communist activity is regarded as subversive, it appears, a report was sent to the Government of India who took urgent action to withdraw any encouragement the Empire Association was extending to you."

"I was most shocked to hear this" the Principal continued. "Can you tell me what is the basis of this report?"

"I am rather amazed, sir," Chandru said. "A little while ago, I was telling you I was attempting to write a serious book. It is now more or less complete. That book is the result of my labours of the last few months after my M.A. examination. When it is published, you will see what kind of subversion it contains. It is true I was studying the data which were available at a friend's place. As these contained various figures about investment of capital, profits, repatriation of money from India by foreign companies and so on, it is just likely that these were mistaken to be subversive, especially if someone had put the idea into the minds of the C.I.D., that these were communist documents. Now, I recollect, sir, some time ago, I did hear that some burglars had broken into these premises. But I had no idea it had anything to do with the C.I.D. and that it had something to do with me.

"Looking back, I can now see how this happened. But I am sorry indeed, for what I did was a perfectly factual study and, as a specialist in economics, you yourself will

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see when the book comes out, that it is so. If the Empire Association's prize depends on my keeping out of legitimate fields of study and research, I would be really sorry for the Empire and the Association."

Chandru continued after a pause —

"What you have disclosed to me has greatly relieved my mind. I could not understand why the Empire Association had taken an unprecedented step like this, withdrawing an invitation which had already been extended. Now, I am not sorry at all I have lost the trip to London and the I.C.S. I have missed nothing worth having."

The Principal remained silent for some time and then said :

"I can now understand, Chandrasekhar, why you are what you are — not only a bright but a clean student. I shall of course see your book and read it with interest. And I compliment you on your guts. You will go far, my dear boy, and may God show the light to you."

Chandru left the Principal's room in a daze. Who could have played this dirty, scurvy trick — writing an anonymous letter ? He could not think of any one doing this against him, not Ganesh, not Raghu who did not even know, not Prof. Patwardhan — ah, he paused. But why should he ? He was only doing the Professor's own work. And, in all fairness, he had warned Chandru about the tricky nature of the work so that Chandru might be on his guard. He would have to talk with Dr. Patwardhan about it, but he must be cautious. He was totally unfamiliar with this kind of intrigue. In any case, he would see more of Dr. Patwardhan in Hyderabad.

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Chapter 8

Chandru's introduction to the Communist Party was through a very entertaining character. When he reached Hyderabad town after a miserable three-day rail journey, he gave the address that had been given to him to a rickshaw man who took him to a small house in a remote crowded part of the town.

Squatting on the floor in a small room was a fattish man with some papers in his hand. He was much older than Chandru, short and stout, but he seemed very active for his stocky build. He got up and shook hands addressing Chandru as 'Comrade'. This was the first time he was being greeted thus and it sounded strange for him, but Chandru merely smiled in reply.

"The description fits you," his host said with enthusiasm. "I could have met you at the railway station, but I thought it would be better if we met here. Hyderabad is a funny place where the past is very much alive in the present and His Exalted Highness frowns on the future. You can carry hand-grenades in your hand like cucumbers and no one would know, but you carry a modern handbag and you can be hauled up to be checked at the police station. I hope you reached home safe without incident. You like the place ?"

"The drabest I have seen," Chandru said.

"What do you think is the reason we meet here — for no other. Nothing happens in Hyderabad, The Lords live their lives in a stupor of faith in Allah and good living and others serve them in the same spirit. Modernity exists only in a few square feet of His Exalted Highness' territory and this is where the British Residency is located — and we are now, you and I, far away from it. We are among the lost population of H.E.H.'s Dominions. That is the one great

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advantage with these Princely States. If they catch you in Hyderabad, they will bury you alive. But the possibility of being caught is very remote, for the rich always have their eyes straining towards heaven and the Nizam. The poor have no eyes to look anywhere — they are the lowliest and the lost."

"It is very amusing," Chandru responded. "I did feel the place was chosen for its anonymity."

"Just right," said the friend. "But let us not be anonymous. I should have said 'let me not' since I know all about you. My name is Shankar — Shankar Sukkul of Gujarat originally, now of nowhere and everywhere. I am 48 — don't be surprised, it is true. I am well preserved, for I eat well and sleep well and do plenty of work. So I keep young."

"I am a member of the Party. I have been asked to take you into confidence. My job now is to put you in the way. You are not the only one. Four more are coming. Don't worry. The landlord is well paid and keeps his counsel. He has been told that we are here for an insurance survey and I am to make a tour with the help of you all. So, we will be going round most of the time. The poor man will keep silent because he needs money and, if he suspects anything, he will still keep quiet. In his Exalted Highness' Dominions, nobody talks except to praise the Nizam — just a matter of personal safety."

Chandru did not have to say anything. Mr. Sukkul rattled on and on endlessly. He had a squeaky voice and there was a naughty smile in his eyes. No one would believe that this man could be a member of a revolutionary political party. It was on the whole a welcome change for Chandru, from the three days he spent in travel in atrocious discomfort caused by the heat and the crowd.

He had been in deep thought about where this new

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adventure would take him. He had uttered brave words to his family to allay their doubts and fears, but satisfying his own mind was not so easy. The Principal's disclosure about the anonymous letter had complicated matters. He had been a student and had had no politics except for lining up with Raghu in his antics (and Raghu had cleverly got out of it) but now the Government had dubbed him and d-d him as a politician, with a label too as a Communist.

A Communist ! Like Dr. Patwardhan, living a double life ? The first conclusion he came to was in a way a negative one. He would not be a politician and he would not accept any label. From the day he saw Nani sick in the stark desolation of her poverty, his love for her had blended with an anger against a society which could keep millions of people in such a condition. He was not sure — indeed, he had serious doubts — whether communism would be the answer. But from what Dr. Patwardhan and others proclaimed, it should be an avenue to one. Like the honest student he was, he decided to approach the subject sympathetically. The best way to read and appreciate a book was to open it with sympathy — and curiosity if you like — but not hostility. That would be his perspective in Hyderabad.

The venue of the grand conference was in keeping with the atmosphere of dramatic comedy provided by his new friend Shankar Sukkul. Chandru was amazed to know that it was a grand palace, way out from Hyderabad city, whither they had to travel by an ambling train. In Shankar's words, it was one of those farm bungalows. "One of the Nawabs had a grand idea some fine day and a farm for grapes was started. It was getting well on its way when the great Lord decided to put up a mansion for him to go and spend weekends. But he suddenly got angry with the Superintendent and closed the farm down, grapes, servants and all. One of our men has offered to buy it off him and we are supposed to be inspecting the palace. The Nawab is attracted by the terms.

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"There are some 10 or 12 rooms and we are lodged there. We have a small office. The bungalow has a caretaker but we have got him away. He has been disposing off items of the stores on the sly and we have sent him to our contacts in Bombay and they will keep him there till we leave here in three days. The Nawab has not time enough for his harem and he already feels he has got rid of the farm associated with the 'obnoxious Superintendent'."

Having delivered his piece, Shankar promptly spread his mat on the floor and, in a few minutes, was snoring comfortably. Chandru said to himself that the C.P.I. should be interesting if there were such epicurean souls in it.

The big bungalow, where the C.P.I. members were housed, Chandru found, was the most unimaginably odd place for a communist hide-out. It was a magnificent place with big rooms, a grand dining hall and luxurious furniture, all in an aweful state of neglect, as the few servants who worked under the caretaker were either not paid or so ill-paid they never came near the bungalow. Two of them were inducted as servants for the kitchen service of the "new owners", on promise of continued employment. Most of the party men who were sworn to brave any weather, were apparently having the time of their lives using the luxurious beds in the bed rooms, some sleeping on the plush Persian carpets. Chandru could not help laughing to himself at this momentary prosperity of the leaders of the proletarian revolution. One of the first to greet Chandru was Dr. Patwardhan, but he did not seem to be one of the big wigs here. Chandru did not see him when the crowd assembled for the meeting.

The President's speech was on the lines of the harangue Chandru had heard from Mr. Phatke at Ganesh's place, except that there seemed to be a lot of pomp and solemnity here — and, of course, a large number of people with a few women including one young woman who appeared to Chandru to be very pretty. While he himself sat at one end of the

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front row, she sat near Dr. Patwardhan at the opposite end of the second row. She was obviously chatty and amusement was written all over her face.

The President was undoubtedly an orator and Chandru was quite thrilled by the occasion. He combined enormous sarcasm with passion and appeal. Declaring that their party had to keep tactfully apart from the rest of the nationalist crowd, he said :

"Unity, even a temporary patched-up unity, seems impossible to me. These nationalists do not think like us. Once imperialism is thrown off, their battle ends and ours begins. To us, the imperialists are not merely the British but those who will take the flag of independence from them and carry on like their masters, as their stooges and agents. Unless we are prepared even now to fight not only the British but their successors, we can forget the goal of a proletarian revolution."

At the end of the four-hour session which went on till midnight, Shankar came and whispered to him that he was to meet the President sharp at 8.45 the next morning. When he reached the President's room, which had apparently been the State Room of the Palace where the Nawab had been receiving his guests, he found there were three of them including the girl he had seen the previous day.

As he went in, the President said : "Let me introduce you to each other. Miss Asha Jyoti Ganguly topped the list in the Calcutta University with a Master's degree in Economics five years ago and had been helping us in Bengal, though this is the first time she is joining us in a conference. Mr. Chandrasekhar — Chandru to us — has an equally good academic record from the Madras University and he comes from the far south, from the Princely State of Travancore, one of the most conservative areas in our country. He is not yet in our party, but he has escaped being caught by the imperialist camp through the I.C.S. Our Ramani —

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his full name is Ramanagopalayya — is from Andhra, from a rich Zamindar family in fact, but disgusted with their artstocracy. He has also a good university background."

With Sundari and Nani always haunting him in his mind, Chandru could not help comparing this girl with the two women he loved. Neither like Sundari nor Nani, she was nevertheless strikingly good-looking with big, sparkling eyes. When he had seen her sitting in the big hall, he had thought she was short and plump, but standing to her full height now, he noticed she had an excellent figure though she was dressed carelessly in a hastily-worn saree. Her lush jet black hair had been cut just to cover the nape of her neck and she looked like one of those fun-loving women's hostel girls. How she had got mixed up with this crowd, he could not imagine. He was curious to know.

On the whole, Chandru was pleased with the set-up. For the first time in many days, he hid not feel the loss of the Empire Association award and the I.C.S. Here was a very colourful company. Indeed, on a first look, each of these men and women would be more interesting than the I.C.S. tribe who were some kind of robots if one got close to them. Poor Raghu ! He used to go into raptures over Congress leaders who played their sporting politics. But here, Chandru was in the lion's den watching the bloody game at work. As the President said, they were not dealing with political but elemental forces which would shake and rouse millions, the masses of the world.

The President explained that the purpose of this meeting was for him to get to know them and help them in what they wanted to do. He added they were young members of the front line with a great future before them and it was best they talked freely and without reservations.

"The work we have before us you will find both interesting and rewarding and there is scope for brilliant people like you. We are eager to have you with us because

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we went to gather into our fold, through you, the younger elements in schools and colleges and in various other spheres so that every day our movement becomes more and more broadbased. Our goddam conservative society does not take young people seriously, but they dare not do that with you. We know — don't we Jyoti? —how, when you mount a platform in Calcutta, there is so much enthusiasm among people, boys and girls! We have not so far capitalised on it because we are not sure how far you yourself are willing to go. Similarly, in Chandru's case, he can catch the attention of the University students anywhere, though I don't know yet whether he can fit into our grass-roots crowd, the peasantry and the workers. As for Ramani, I understand you have already become a marked man, more due to the foolishness of our men than any fault of yours. We had asked them to interest you in our movement, but they had got you into one of our cells under police watch and now you are in it. Since we don't want to lose you, we have to find a new field for you so that you are not identified with us and can give your best to the party without being perpetually under surveillance.

"During the last five years or more, we have been trying to bring together talented young men and women who can give a new leadership to the masses. Most of them came to us when we functioned independently, but, when we decided to collaborate with the nationalists for limited purposes, many of them went into the terrorist groups. They are with us, of course, and we have need for them. But that is neither here nor there for us today and we have to deal with a new situation as I have already explained. And, I would like to know how you can identify yourself with us."

It was Ramani who spoke first and declared that it was his view that the goody-goody politics of the Gandhi school would lead them nowhere and he wanted to join the group which stood for "action". The President said that he was not surprised about his stand and he would help him to join the group where he would fit in.

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"But I have to give you a warning, Ramani," he said. "My comrades will have to be sure of both your physical and mental calibre. I must also warn you in all fairness that you will not be able to break away once you are in it."

Ramani replied that he had no two minds about it and in fact was already committed. He had left his home and he would leave his future in the hands of the Party. The President got up, patted him on the back. "You will be contacted by our men soon" Ramani then left.

"What about you now, Jyoti ?" the President turned to her. "Funny calling you 'Jyoti'. That is a man's name in Bengal, isn't it ? Perhaps I should call you Asha."

"O, that you may," she said laughing. "Only, I may not respond. From the day I was that high (she lowered her palm to a child's height) I was called Jyoti. It was an old grand uncle of mine who saw me one day wearing a pant and said : 'You are not Asha but Jyoti !' From that day, it caught on. He continued to call me Jyoti and I don't remember anyone calling me Asha. Somehow it has stuck and I have been Jyoti for as long as I remember."

"Odd," said the President smiling, "but then, give the rose any name....." and they laughed.

"Now seriously, Jyoti" he continued, "I am facing a lot of criticism that, while the party treats you as a member, you have never owned it ; and our partymen are unhappy. The complaint is, you are not involving yourself in party affairs."

"Well, the choice is yours," the young lady replied. "The difference between me and the party is technical. I am fully in agreement with your political ideas. I do not understand why you say I have not involved myself. In Bengal, we have had enough work and the younger elements, as you call them, are organised as nowhere else in the

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country. I have been in their midst and that, I think, is involvement enough. In the Unions, in youth bodies, in literary groups and among political splinter groups, I am well-known and have been quite active. If you mean by involvement I have not flaunted the party label, I would say I have done this deliberately. I don't want to be caught up in a rigid frame-work without scope for initiative and turned into an 'also ran' in this big world movement.

"I know, Comrade President, you want me, and want to be sure of me. You can rest assured that you can be sure of me. You know, Comrade, — you should know — how I was brought into the party. That is an old story. Let us forget it. But now, I am in the movement and I have convinced myself that it is valid. Yes, I am here with you all because I am convinced of the cause."

Miss Ganguly was a powerful speaker. Her ideas and her clipped sentences with her clear and bold voice held both the President and Chandru listening intently. Chandru could not help looking at her and then noticing her extra-ordinary face, full of life, her feelings surging in waves of passion as it were. Could one speak of agility about a face ? She had that. The eyes had ebullience, not langour, and the lips matched with a readiness ever to break into a smile. When she turned, Chandru realised he had been staring and he looked away. He felt she had registered that.

"But no, please don't think this is a proviso or a reservation" Miss Ganguly continued. "What I mean to say is, I want to formulate my ideas and exchange thoughts with people like me, not here in India — I am sorry to say not many of them here have any ideas — but abroad, in the west in particular and in Moscow and other European countries. Since you have said there is no dearth of funds, I would like to go to London first. I shall be in touch with Comrades there and shall be back in four or five years and then you can decide whether the party has gained or lost through me."

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"I am glad, Jyoti, you have come out of your shell," the President said. "We were rather deceived by your flightiness, which some of us took your light-heartedness to be, which is the reason why I was a little severe when I spoke to you. We have an expert body here to decide these matters, but I shall back you fully and hope that there will not be much difficulty. We may also have to arrange for your passport."

"Oh, please don't worry about it at all", Jyoti said in an amused tone. "I should be able to manage that. I may not have bothered you even about the money, but I want to go as a Party nominee and I want the party to know that I am with them safe and solid. You may tell your friends that from Jyoti."

Chandru was caught in a spell. Everything about this young woman was so vibrant, brilliant, radiant — he could not find the right expression. She got up and, as Chandru was standing nearby, she caught him by the arm and gave a gentle crush and turned to leave.

Chandru said in a gush, "If you don't mind, sir, may I request Miss Ganguly to stay on and hear what we have to say to each other?"

"Of course, if you wish it. After all, you have heard them," the President said. "Please stay, Jyoti, if you are not in a hurry." As Jyoti took her seat, he continued : "I had better begin by telling you what is in my mind."

"Chandru, it is less than six months since your name has come into our records. Since it is your story, you know the bulk of it and it is not necessary for me to go into it. The point now is about the future. You have the gift of writing and, in a very short time, you have made a mark. Prof. Patwardhan, one of our spotters for talent, has given us a lengthy report about your abilities. I must say, we have also an idea of your limitations. Your highly emotional nature can land you and us into trouble. If there is a

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thing called legacy, you have it in the fullest measure from your bourgeois background. But all that, we have concluded, is nothing compared to what you can do for us. Since you have come here to join us at this conference, about which we were rather sceptical, I take it that you are with us and, proceeding on that basis, I would like to have an idea of what your plans are."

"Well, sir," Chandru began.

"Please don't call me 'sir,'" the President interrupted him. "We have no term for each other other than 'Comrade'. But if you can't get rid of the habit, let us not make much of it. Let us carry on. But, you will learn 'Comrade' is a term which catches on."

"I am sorry, sir, what I have to say may appear crude to you. Any good university student today knows about Marx and Communism and the more vocal among them may be able to speak a great deal about them. But I wish to avoid this. Unlike Miss Ganguly here who has been in the party for five years, I have not had any occasion even to see it function at any level. I am here in fact partly out of curiosity and partly in good faith to educate myself. I am not sure too whether I am not in quest of a career. You are perfectly right about the bourgeois legacy.

"But, forgetting that for the moment, I have a feeling that, in our generation, we, any of us or all of us — perhaps Miss Ganguly may agree — cannot escape the fact that a big challenge is facing us. I am not talking about politics, but there must be a link somewhere between what we call our political aims about which you spoke yesterday and the crisis facing our society which you summed up beautifully when you asked : "For whom is this freedom we are fighting for ? Is it for a few or the many ?"

"I would like to know, sir, whether the communist movement can provide an answer for it and how it must

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function to do so. My mind is full of queries. But I can say this : Perhaps I am a wishful visionary. This is what I long for in our movement. My picture of a revolution is a rivulet starting from somewhere in the dark caverns of our society, ultimately to swell into a flood, flow over arid lands and create a new world of plenty from which all benefit and benefit equally."

"What poetry!" cried Miss Ganguly gently clapping her hands. She then added, seeing how Chandru was hurt. "Come to earth, Comrade. We are in the land of men and women and not angels and saints."

"I am sure you can understand what I mean, Miss Ganguly", Chandru said. "I hope you understand me, sir. I am not speaking about the party. I am speaking about my vision of it. In five years, madam, I may come down to earth like you. But right now, nothing less strong than such visions can bring me into your ranks. I would like to tell you in all honesty, I am at the exit point from one world. It is difficult for me to get away from it. The emotional ties are too strong. But just as I look backwards, I also look forward. Something has to draw me, drag me, pull me and charm me. So, I conjure up all these visions. I know that the distant mass of green in a forest with its rugged rocks, thick-set jungles and myriads of wild animals is perhaps what the Communist party is to you and you are ready to play the game knowing the terrain. But I know and see only the green, inviting prospect — and that is just as well now."

"I have made this something of a confession because I don't want to hide my immaturity which my friend or comrade here called my poetry. Let me assure you, all this is not poetry. These are my thoughts, fanciful as they may appear to be, which have brought me here.

"In short, Comrade President, as they call you, what I want is time for myself. Ramani seems to have definite

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ideas, though they are as immature as mine. Miss Ganguly is already well-launched and, as the new phrase goes, ready for the take-off. I want time. I would like to spend more time with you all, engage myself in practical work and do a lot of study. You can put me in a centre where I can see, learn and participate. I do hope I am clear."

"I do understand you, Chandru," the President replied. "I accept your bona fides. But we can't have you in our midst till you become a member of the party, what we call a card-holder. You must take your membership card and accept the conditions we impose. If you are willing to do that, then what you require can be done. But I don't want to rush you into an answer. You take your time. In the meanwhile, I mean to treat you as a card-holder ad interim and you will stay with us here, sharing our life. It is very easy for me to make the necessary arrangements you require. I am positive we shall not be disappointed in you. Shall we leave it there ?"

All the time this talk was going on, Jyoti was listening silently with her head bowed, only occasionally taking a look at Chandru. He noticed that and felt that, perhaps she was bored, being a very forceful and high-spirited woman who had strength as well as experience.

All the three rose. As the President raised his hand in a gesture to say "So long", Chandru and Jyoti slowly walked out.

As they opened the door and stepped out, Jyoti halted for a second and asked : "Well, tell me, are you going to call me Jyoti or Miss Ganguly ?"

Chandru turned to face her and saw her big round eyes — like a child's when serious, he thought. In a trice he decided. "Jyoti," he said smiling.

She burst out into a loud laugh. "Just a bit of histrionics ! You don't mind ?"

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"I do feel, Chandru" she continued smiling. "You are really a poet. I have a feeling that, being a fine human being, you will be a good Communist, but I can't say if this is the same as being a good party member ;"

"I bow to you, wise Jyoti," he said.

"Dear Jyoti —" she quipped "Yes ?"

"Yes, dear Jyoti," he said and both of them laughed and walked briskly to the Conference hall.

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Chapter 9

There was no doubt that the Hyderabad conference was an assembly of very dedicated workers. Reports were presented from all regions of the country and they showed that enormous work had been done to collect data, industry by industry, of workers, wages, etc. One demand from everywhere was for funds to organise meetings, prepare party literature and payment to non-earning party men. Chandru noticed that many of the papers published were mostly confined to the progress made in Soviet Russia under the Communist system and how Russia was the fatherland of the world.

After their meeting with the President, it looked as if he had forgotten them. Even normally quiet, outside the conference hours, Chandru spent his time going through the pamphlets and papers that were made available about earlier debates. He tried to meet Ramani to know what his plans were, but the young man stuck close to two or three men from Bengal and the Punjab, who apparently belonged to the same group. He was not a man for library work, which was Chandru's speciality.

Jyoti saw him quite often, apart from the few occasions when they exchanged courtesies in the debating hall. She behaved almost like a stranger, although from the manner in which they had parted last, he felt that they would be spending a lot of time together. But, on the third day when the meeting adjourned early, the President having said that the final resolution of the conference would be placed before the assembly the next day, Jyoti accosted him and asked him about his plans. He was as cool and brief as she had been and told her that he was trying to collect his thoughts so that he could work out some line of action about the future.

"Perhaps, two will be better for the job," Jyoti said smiling. "As I have time on my hands and as I am the

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senior between the two of us, why can't we make this a combined effort ?"

Chandru warmed up and said he would indeed be most happy if she could spare the time.

"I don't want to go out," she said. "This part of the world is too arid for me, both by its climate and the galaxy of empty heads serving their rich nonsense. We shall move up to a corner of the veranda and, if people see us engaged in serious talk, they will go away ; and then we can talk freely."

"I have been actually wanting to have this chat with you, Chandru," Jyoti began. "Also, I confess, I have been trying to avoid you to some extent. I have myself so many plans on my mind and I didn't want any distraction. And you have been a distraction. You seemed lost and I thought you would like a talk with some one and had not been able to strike the right friendship. Since we will all be parting tomorrow, I thought I would meet and talk to you today."

"I suppose I must say 'thank you' and add that that was exactly what I was wanting," Chandru replied. "But that won't be honest. You see, I have more or less made up my mind and, as the President has offered me help, I have decided to devote some time to studying this movement, first from a theoretical point of view and then closely its working. Perhaps, the student in me is still uppermost and my mind is clear on what I have to do. But I wanted to meet you, Jyoti, for a different reason. First, you bowled me over with your offer of friendship ; and secondly, I feel lonely. And thirdly, perhaps, I should not say it — I am attracted. I love to hear you talk, and I get the notion you are just a step ahead of me in my thinking. It all adds up to some kind of a curiosity. Well, if the President himself was impressed by your talk, my wanting to hear you should not be a surprise."

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Jyoti did not say anything for a minute and then laughed and said : "This kind of talk is rubbish in our party, you know, and I myself think we are silly. We are all here because we have something new in our minds and we know how we can put it forward. You will be speaking tomorrow at the Conference and I shall tell you what I feel."

"Me ?" Chandru asked in surprise. "I have not been told, I am not prepared. Really, I can't speak."

"Well, dear Chandru," Jyoti replied. "Wait and see. You will speak, everyone speaks and that is why we are here. And see what cheering you get after the President has introduced you."

"I would like to clarify some points", Chandru said, "if you can help me — not that this is going to be a talking point, but I would like my mind easy. My first question is, why is there so much secrecy about these meetings ? I have a creepy feeling that we are behaving like thieves. Why ? Again, I hear a lot of talk, even the President does not seem to be sure of himself, "some people', 'our friends' and so on he keeps referring to, about whom we seem to be in the dark. You remember when he spoke to us the other day, he gave us the chance to declare ourselves and offered to help us, but, in the guise of giving us time, he took time to give a decision himself. That is how I saw it as he spoke first to Ramani, then to you and lastly to me. Apparently, nobody here seems to be in absolute control."

Jyoti looked at him in surprise and then laughed : "For a beginner, you are d-d smart, Chandru. You have hit the nail right on the head. These are the only two things which distinguish us from any other political party in the world. We are a congenitally underground crowd and then we never see the *Brahma* who controls our destinies."

Jyoti then asked him why the President said that he had been saved from the I.C.S. Chandru told her that it

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was a long story and a sorry tale. Jyoti said that she was curious and, looking at her face, he felt that she seemed concerned and saw in her a friend in whom he could confide. He told her the story of his life, beginning from his association with Raghu and right up to the disclosure about the anonymous letter. He kept back all references to his family and his personal involvements.

"What is the pamphlet you wrote for Aswath Patwardhan ?" she asked.

"A simple presentation of facts on the imperialist exploitation of our economy. Actually, he gave all the data. I had to analyse them and present them. You may have seen the bright green pamphlet distributed on the first day. The author's name was not given. Actually, it was prepared by me. Prof. Patwardhan said he had to modify it here and there, but I find he has not touched my draft."

"I read that pamphlet," Jyoti said. "It is a clear presentation of facts and figures and, I think, it will have a wide appeal. The police apparently do not know you are the author. If they do, perhaps, there will be trouble."

"The C.I.D. did see it, of course, in its raw form and the result was what happened. The point is, who is the enemy ?"

"There are gaps in your story, Chandru," Jyoti said. "How did you get so close to Patwardhan ?"

"I didn't. He got close to me. One day, he told me his personal story and it was a bloody nasty one and I was greatly moved. Then, we met again, and again. Then he gave me this pamphlet to write. Actually, Jyoti, I am ashamed to say it to you here. I have a lot of the bourgeois in me. I am soft, I suppose, I hate vindictiveness and revenge and I began to feel he was full of it. I made up my mind before the black news came, that I would end my

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contact with him after finishing the monograph and go for the I.C.S.

"You told him that ?'

"Of course, why should I hide ? I said I was going to London and write the I.C.S. there."

Jyoti stared at him and he thought that she was startled. After a long silence, she said with bitterness in her voice :

"It was Aswath who wrote that letter. I did guess it, but now I am sure. You know Chandru, these people are all the time looking for 'young talent'. That is what they say. The better class of people among them look for bright boys and girls in Colleges and rich families, you know, quick fire lads, and somehow get them into the party. They are involved somehow or other inextricably and then they grow up. Well, that is what happened to me too, but I shall tell you about that later.

"What exactly did you tell him ?"

"To be honest, he was really quite nice to me and asked me about my plans. As he had been in England, I was eager to know about life there. I was very enthusiastic, you see, England somehow attracts you — it is probably the English literature and English history which we have swallowed up emotionally. I explained to him that I was anxious to stay there as long as possible, get my I.C.S., go to Oxford and so on. He was extremely nice."

"Can't you see what he has done, Chandru ? He wanted to know how far you had gone away from the party and planned the kill then and there. It is a dirty trick, but it is in the party style. He must have got his clearance from headquarters before he wrote that letter.

"I am not sorry," she continued, "and I would advise you not to feel sorry or even be angry with him. For one

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thing, whatever Aswath may have meant, the life you are entering is a far more interesting one than the Empire and the I.C.S. For another, I am glad I met you." She got up saying : "It is time for dinner. I shall tell you my story after we finish with it. I can assure you, it is an equally squalid one."

They sat together at dinner where the entire congregation was present and there was a lot of chatter and cheer. The President came to Chandru and told him : "I forgot to tell you, Chandru. Your name is on the list of speakers for tomorrow. If you like, you can tell them all that you told me. I am sure many will be interested. You may meet Dhame later and talk to him about your future programme. I shall be leaving tomorrow, but you can always get in touch with me."

Then he smiled at Jyoti and walked off. It was more than an hour before they came back to their seats again on the veranda.

"I promised to tell you my story," Jyoti began. "I was a star of the Calcutta University, like you in your place. I was our College Union President, a favourite of the teachers and a darling at home. I lost my father when I was a child. I don't remember him. I was brought up by my two brothers and they and my mother doted on me. We were quite poor and I was helped in my university career through my scholarships and private help from my Professors. My mother was very eager that I should marry and an alliance was fixed up, but it broke as we could not meet the dowry demands of the other party.

"My career began in a way that made it inevitable that I should be different from other Bengali girls. With my activities in the College Union, I became a youth leader and was often invited to join youth gatherings and I made the usual fiery speeches against the British. We had a senior police officer related to us and interested in me, and he

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met us one day and cautioned me about my friends. "We have in our department bad records about them," he told me.

"But this kind friend did not discourage me about the tone of my speeches. I had no means of knowing whom my uncle had meant when he spoke about my friends. For about a year, my public speaking became a common affair. I could speak in English and Bengali and I began gathering crowds.

"That is not what brought me into trouble. My M.A. examination was barely two months away — and, if I had done my M.A., I might have taken to an academic career — when some politicians invited me to one of their committee meetings. Since they mentioned a popular political campaign, I went."

Jyoti paused, sighed and continued :

"You will be shocked if I tell you what happened. There were only three of us, all students. There were lots of communist literature and various other things in that room. It was a small house in a crowded locality. I did not know the other young men, but they had known me. We thought the others would be joining us. But the people who came in another fifteen minutes or so were a lorry full of police under the command of three or four white officers. We were taken aback. They pushed us to a corner and searched the place. Apart from the literature, they discovered some country-made bombs and "lethal weapons" as the police called them.

"Fetters were clamped on us although we protested that we were students and were in that house for the first time. But no one listened and we were driven to a police station."

"That is how I became a Communist, Chandru," Jyoti's tone was cynical. "I did not know what was Communism

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except what I had read in my text books. We were 'interrogated' the next morning and it was not difficult for them to find out that we were innocent victims of some hardened terrorists. The other two were let off, but my name was in the police list as an anti-government agitator.

"A case was registered against me, but my uncle got some influence to bear and I was allowed to write the M.A. examination. I was released on parole. I was too shocked to weep and I had no time to think. I got to my text books and brushed up my notes. Believe me, Chandru, I was scared stiff when I went for the examination, though my teachers were all kind to me. I passed my M.A. with a First Class, but that news came to me when I was in jail, for I had been taken into custody again and at 21, I was sentenced to six months imprisonment. I spent that period in the Midnapore jail."

"Can you imagine what happens to a girl of that age in such circumstances ? I became most violently anti-British and I swore I would be a terrorist for life. I forgot my brothers and, straight from jail, I went back to the place from where they had picked me up and screamed that I would kill every Englishman in town. Later, I learnt I had become hysterical. What had happened was I had become mentally deranged and was in hospital for three months. One of my brothers blamed me for all that had happened, though the other, who was only three or four years older to me, was soft. But he was helpless. All my other relatives boycotted me.

"When I came out of hospital, the only friends I had were communist party men. They gave me all the comfort and kindness I needed and I must say one thing in their favour. I was quite a good-looking girl and was in the prime of my age. But no one touched me or made any indecent approaches to me. One of them was extremely kind and, during my worst days in hospital, he stood by me and saved me. I owe him the new life I began after I left hospital.

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"Since my interest was in books, my new friends gave me plenty of books and a whole lot of Communist literature. I did not know what they were, but they gave me new and interesting ideas and fed my revolutionary zeal. I was introduced to some women workers in the Unions and was entrusted with building up the youth organisation.

"For three years, I was a favoured woman and gradually, as a trained communist, I got to mixing up with all kinds of people, a very mixed and a very interesting crowd. I was twenty-five. I was more or less a party member though I was not a card-holder and had numerous important tasks entrusted to me — writing, speaking, helping young leaders to get together and assigning duties to them.

It was only last year when I had been a communist for four and a half years, that I learnt about the story of my arrest. My uncle had become Deputy Commissioner of Police in the city and I was one day taken to the police station. I was quite tough by then and was not at all afraid. Further, I knew I had not been involved in any illegal activity such as the police could frame a charge upon.

"I was surprised when I saw the person to whom I was taken. It was my uncle. He asked all the others to withdraw and asked me to sit and passed on a file marked 'secret' to me.

"Can you recognise that hand-writing, my child?" he asked.

"The file opened with a letter disclosing the venue of our meeting on that fateful evening and the time. It was a brief letter. I was stunned to see it. The hand-writing was bold and clear and the hand that wrote it was that of the host who had called us for the meeting and under whom I had been working subsequent to my release from jail.

"I looked at my uncle and he must have seen the storm rising in my eyes. He took the file back from me and

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cautioned me not to give way. Don't worry, my dear. Many of us are with you and are only biding our time. Only, God need not have taken you this way. Now, you know your friends. You work for your destiny but know the ground. That is what I wanted to tell you. Now I shall send you to my Deputy who will question you. Give him a statement that you were not involved in the particular incident about which they will speak to you. As we know that you have a perfect alibi, they will not detain you."

He rang the bell and I was taken to an Anglo-Indian Special Superintendent who took down my statement and warned me not to get caught with the wrong crowd.

"That cursed devil who deceived me is now dead. The simple truth is, that is how many of us began. You need not regret, as I have already told you. We shall meet in Bombay and talk about our plans."

She got up, her old happy self. It was rather late in the night and people were going to their rooms. As they too moved to the staircase in the main hall, Jyoti whispered:

"My room-mate is sleeping elsewhere tonight. Will you come to my room?"

Chandru had heard her with great emotion and he had been deeply touched and could hardly resist the temptation. But he said :

"No, dear Jyoti, don't....."

Jyoti asked : "Are you married, my dear bourgeois?"

Chandru replied : "No"

"Are you thinking of any woman?"

Chandru : "Yes, I am thinking of the woman who is bearing my child."

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Jyoti smiled : "Good night".

Chandru and Jyoti met only once before the Conference in Hyderabad dispersed. This was when Jyoti met him in the big hall the next evening after all the speeches were over. Jyoti gently guided him to the garden and, when out of hearing of the crowd told him that although she had never heard a more moving speech before, he should shake himself up and remember that he was entering the field of politics.

"You have a tremendous power to move people, Chandru," she said. "Indeed, you can rouse passions. It is a fantastic gift. Patwardhan should have a feather in his cap for having discovered you. But you will be paying a big price if you allow yourself to be exploited by clever scheming Machiavellis who are with us also, as in any other political party. I could see that the President was greatly touched. He had a word with me and was happy you took time to study and watch. He is giving instructions to Dhame to keep you away from the Groups.

"For the rest....." she paused. She stopped walking and turned and stood facing him. With a face full of her mysterious power, she looked at him straight into his eyes and smiled : "Goodbye, dear Chandru, it seems I can never part from you. Take care of yourself, this is a rotten world."

Then she turned and they walked back rapidly to the bungalow.

This little drama left Chandru in a flutter. He was greatly affected by the emotion of the moment, but, back in the bungalow, it seemed everyone was in a rush and the President who, stood in the middle of a crowd signalled to him to wait. After about ten minutes, he brought another man and came up to him. "Chandru, meet Dhame. He is our organising man in Bombay. You will travel with him tomorrow to Bombay and he will arrange for your

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lodging and boarding. If you need money, you can ask him and he has instructions to help. As it will be quite some time before you start party work, you will have plenty of time for yourself. Don't get too close to party groups. There are all kinds of them. As you know, we need all, and everyone has a job. Dhame will be your guide, philosopher and friend. Don't unload your lore on him and, conversely, don't expect any. He is one of our men, deliberately kept outside the party. I hope you understand what I mean. In other words, his work is not such as to invite police attention. He is a book-shop owner who sells mostly non-Communist books. Don't laugh — he is also our stockist.

"So — all luck. As I shall be in Bombay often, we shall meet from time to time."

Then he shook hands and was about to turn away when he said : "Ah, about your speech, Chandru. You are a flaming orator, but too naive and honest. You have a lot to learn, but you have tact and I am sure you will learn. But try to learn, not the hard way but by being alert."

Dhame was a short little man, perhaps in his late forties, beginning to grey, with a face brimming with good humour, his hair flying all over, with a shirt collar hanging over a half-buttonedup coat. The first thing he told Chandru shaking him vigorously by the hand was : "I must rush now. But we shall talk in the train."

Chandru ran into Jyoti a little later, but she was hurrying away. He looked at her retreating form from his door and thought he would miss her, his first, possibly his only friend in the new world. Then, he went back to the reception room, collected whatever literature was made available, including his own pamphlet which he had written for Dr. Patwardhan who was also present there. But Chandru avoided him.

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The next morning when Chandru came down with his suitcase and bed roll, he found that the batch due to take the morning train had already left, Jyoti with the rest. He missed her badly. Then he waited for Dhame to come and join the company for Bombay.

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Chapter 10

In the evolution of his life as a student politician, Chandru's life in Bombay had two features. One was his contact with Dhame whom the President had recommended as his would-be guide, philosopher and friend. The other was the friendliness of his landlord, a sweet old man in his seventies.

It seemed to Chandru that Dhame was not only a man who led a double life but one he would call a 'double man'. He could talk profusely like one of those city jokers you meet on a train who in no time becomes a friend whom you have known for years, shares his views with you on everything under the sun including his private life (real or fictitious) and then simply collects his bags when his destination is reached and walks out of your life. With equal adroitness, Dhame can talk endlessly or freeze up and reply to you, if he is so minded, in mono-syllables.

In the train from Hyderabad he was a talker. With numerous heavy boxes (the bulk of it dangerous communist literature) he took no time to reveal himself to be a book-seller. Not a word about politics, but he kept the crowd of his third class co-travellers regaled with first-hand accounts of the book trade referring to all kinds of amusing anecdotes. He laughed at the Communist literature that was being dumped from nowhere, but, for the fashionable non-reading elite who wanted to display big colourful books in their drawing rooms, these were ideal — magnificent books in beautiful print and for no price at all!

Speaking to Chandru as if he was meeting him for the first time, he broke into a full lecture on life in Bombay. "Provided you are not choosy, you can land on a job in 24 hours. Shoot out an application to ten or twelve of the big companies which have a long list of telephone numbers shown in the Directory — and then, you are in the electric

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train dawn and dusk going to office and coming back home, till you wake up one day like Lord Byron and find yourself an old man. Dhame was a book-seller and not a reader of books, and he had heard somewhere that Lord Byron woke up one day and found himself to be something. It did not matter to him whether the great Lord woke up to find himself old or famous.

"Many men have no time to marry, many have gone to dogs — they call it races here — and many have mastered the art of living in two-roomed tenements rapidly populating the city. Some, like me, have ticked like a clock with no gains, no losses and no tears — don't ask me for how many years !"

The President had indicated to Chandru that Dhame was the focal point of a good deal of underground activity. Would anyone hearing him talk, suspect that he was anything but a lower-middle class book-seller ?

With fatigue overtaking everyone, Dhame too slept off. But Chandru lay with eyes shut, but awake, not only awake but seeing all kinds of pictures, hearing all kinds of voices, his mother's Charu's, his poor father's and the doctor's and Nani's — and yes, Sundari's. Never more alone, but not alone.

As they reached the book-shop — a quiet place near Bori Bunder, not too striking and not too clumsy to attract comment — Dhame froze up. He lived in a first floor room aproached through a staircase from one side, which was cut off from the rest of the house. Admirable, Chandru thought, for this man's double life. For two days, not more than a dozen words came from him though they were in the same place and Chandru spent all his waking hours rummaging the enormous number and variety of books Dhame stocked in his one-man establishment.

Chandu decided that this shop could not be the place for him and sought Dhame's help to get an independent

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room where he could work. The very next day Dhame announced that he had found a room for him far from the madding crowd where he could live like Robinson Crusoe. Dhame of course had his own style.

Chandru was for long grateful to Dhame for his introduction to his landlord, Mr. Ghosh. He was a most loveable old man who lived happily with his wife whom he called "Gowrima'. Chandru began to understand why the President had placed so much trust in Mr. Dhame from the manner in which he had fixed up in no time a place for his residence. It seemed made to order for him — a single large room with an attached bath which would cost him Rs. 30 per month. It was really the guest room of a big first-floor flat, but, being completely independent at the front of the house, he could be by himself undisturbed if he closed the door. It had a big window with an excellent view on a wide circular park. It took barely a week for Chandru to settle down. With Dhame's help, he had a bed fixed up, a working table and two or three racks for books and stationery. With the guarantee of Dhame's book-shop, he managed to buy a good typewriter on hire purchase terms and was indeed set for living in Bombay for as long as he liked.

There was one fact about his new life which somewhat surprised and also satisfied him. He did not feel homesick. The explanation was rational. He could not have lived a 'double life', as he was now accustomed to call it, under his father's roof. To be with his parents, he would have had to sacrifice the pleasure and the honour of being decent to Nani. So, it was best he was away from her. Distance also lightened the burden of regret. Also, in Bombay, he was beginning a new life. He had to do it some day and the earlier he began the better. He felt sad most for his sister Charu and his brother Cheenu who needed his guidance. He had to write to them without delay.

His first letter, however, was to Nani, a brief note saying he had an interesting time in Hyderabad and that

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his life had not essentially changed as he was still a student. He hoped that Nani was now settled with her mother in their new house and enquired after her health and whether she had met Dr. Manuel. He avoided expressions of love except to say that he could not take his mind off her. Nani was fastidious about proprieties and she would not welcome anything more than that. The letter was addressed, as previously arranged, to c/o Dr. Manuel. He also mentioned that his stories were being published under his pen name 'Gangadharan' and he had arranged for payments to her.

The letter to his father and mother were, on the other hand, extremely sentimental. He enclosed separate letters to Charu and Cheenu. He told them that he was thrilled to attend the Hyderabad conference and his speech there was very much appreciated. He had not yet found any political affiliation, but his general approach and temperament drew him towards the socialists. He informed his father that he had asked for the remuneration for his newspaper articles to be sent to him. He would request him to treat this as his contribution to the household and also to build up a fund for Charu's marriage. He had also requested his Calcutta publishers to send all moneys to be remitted to his father. The first payment would be Rs. 2,000 which the publishers had promised to send him as soon as his book was accepted.

Chandru found his landlord to be an extraordinarily kind and friendly person. The very first day he called on him, he told Chandru that he saw him come in the previous day and wanted to greet him, "but, you know, these days some young people like to be left alone. I am glad you called. We have been in Bombay for many years and any help we can give you will be yours for the asking."

Chandru's happy response was obvious on his face and he thanked him saying that it was very kind of him to say that, but speaking for himself, he felt that it would be good for old people if a young man like him were to be around,

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to be of use to them. He was happy he would be able to play this role for them.

Chandru was happy he was going to share his life with a Bengali family. He had learnt some Bengali in his school days with the help of a Bengali family who had been their neighbours. Though he was now very much out of touch, the old people were happy to hear a few words of Bengali from him. Chandru felt that he had really found a sweet home in Bombay with these two old souls, apparently pining for company. Mr. Ghosh told him that he had come to Bombay many years ago, transferred by the Calcutta company where he had been working and he was now settled in Bombay. He had two daughters who were married and settled in Calcutta and he and Gowrima occasionally visited them, but normally, they preferred to stay by themselves in Bombay.

He asked Chandru for particulars about himself, calling his wife to join them to hear Chandru's story. Coffee (the old people said they had become coffee 'addicts' after coming to Bombay) and sweets were brought. The lady was in her late sixties. Their open-hearted friendship was touching and Chandru told them that he was hoping to settle down as a writer having decided not to take up any employment. One of his books was getting published in Calcutta and some newspapers had also begun to accept his articles. He said he was not in politics, but he sympathised with the Communist party and the Russian revolution which had been inspiring oppressed peoples and over the world.

"You are theoretically right," the old man declared. "But where is the Communist party of India? Nobody hears of them except where there is some strike or bomb-throwing when their leaders get arrested. Look at the Congress. They are all over the place with their meetings and their demonstrations and so on, though, I tell you, I know half of them are rogues and make money on the sly."

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"Are you already a Communist?" Mr. Ghosh asked. "Not that I would mind it, but keep out of trouble both for your sake and ours."

Chandru expressed his gratitude to them and said that he was only a student who was trying to establish himself as a writer. "I do a lot of work, reading and writing. I hope you will not mind my typewriter noise."

They invited Chandru to mess with them. But he said that, as there was a good South Indian hotel nearby, he could take food there. He wanted a part-time servant to keep his room tidy and, immediately, Mrs. Ghosh said it was their servant's duty to do this and they would make sure he cleaned his room every day.

"How do your friends call you? Surely, not by that jaw-breaking name 'Chandrasekhar'?"

"I am called 'Chandru' at home and by my friends. You will of course call me 'Chandru".

"Chandru! Good, we will call you Chandru. You must be some 50 years younger to me. I don't know whether I should treat you as a son or grandson."

Chandru was touched by the affectionate tone of the old couple. He felt that here at last seemed to be some compensation for all that he had lost.

He heard from home in reply to his letters. His father wrote that the Calcutta publishers had sent a cheque for Rs. 2000 and they had expressed satisfaction that the book had found good public response. Both his brother and sister said they were all missing him. Charu had poured out her affection in six pages of foolscap writing about anything and everything she could think of. For news, she said, Sundari was in correspondence with her and had made anxious inquiries about him. Rajaraman had seen his book

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and said that it seemed to have a left-wing theme which meant that it was anti-government. "Sundari has asked me to write to you to be very, very careful and that she is having nightmares about your having to go to jail."

"Though you are far away," Charu wrote, "and had to give up your I.C.S., it tickled me to see Raghu jealous. He turned up here two days ago, to return your books and said that he was going to Delhi to write the I.C.S examination and asked me incidentally, 'Have you seen Chandru's book, Charu ?'. It must mint money, provided, of course, it is not banned. Politics is not a happy career, but money and fame will chase Chandru."

Although Chandru was greatly cheered by these letters, he was full of concern why he had not heard from Nani. It was nearly two months since they had parted and he had not had a line from her ! A telegram ultimately brought a short reply with a slip attached to it in Dr. Manuel's hand. Chandru was delighted to see that Nani now wrote a steady hand but the contents of the letter shocked him. It said that she had been very ill and was in hospital for more than a month. She had been in great pain but, fortunately, nothing untoward happened and she was now safe. Though it was a brief letter, Chandru had an idea of Nani's condition from Dr. Manuel's slip : "That will do now. The poor thing is weeping like mad." Chandru sent a hurried letter to Dr. Manuel thanking her profusely. He also sent a brief but very loving and encouraging letter to Nani saying he was longing to see her and signed himself "Your beloved husband, Chandru."

Two days later, full of thoughts about Nani, he sent another letter to Dr. Manuel requesting her to send him a photograph of Nani.

Chandru began giving serious thought to his new book. The liberation struggle of the colonies would be a political struggle which should end some time, but the exploitation of

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the poor by the rich would mean a permanent economic struggle. His thesis would, therefore, extend beyond the problem of imperialism. Chandru was convinced that it would make an absorbing study.

He had a scheme of work in his mind but, before he could make a beginning, he had a letter from the President through Dhame. It was a long letter in which, after saying that he was writing to Chandru as a party comrade though he was not one yet, the President explained that the job he wanted Chandru to undertake would not be wholly or simply a party matter. He believed that Chandru would himself be interested and he sought his co-operation only to that extent. "The political part of it I shall leave for a personal discussion when we meet next," he said.

The President's letter went into a long disquisition on the neglect of youth by the nation's leaders now preparing for a major showdown with the British government. In the major Presidency towns, there were big gatherings of university students and the leaders of the freedom struggle had to educate them on the crisis facing the people.

"I hope you were able to have talks with Jyoti when you were in Hyderabad about the work she had done in Bengal. It was my hope that she would join us in the work we had on hand, but she was insistent on going abroad, and, as she has been asking for it for a long time, we could not stop her, particularly since we should have some liaison with similar groups in England and Europe. She has done a magnificent job in Calcutta and has also trained some groups.

"This is the work we would like you to undertake in Madras. The Congress has got up a fairly broadbased organisation. We have given our support to it, but we have some reservations. They want the students to join the national struggle. The Congress youth movement stops there, but we want our struggle to be more forward-looking and must have a bigger goal. The youth of the country

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must be organised for that purpose. In fact, you yourself spoke on those lines at Hyderabad. I want you to undertake this important work and I feel, so far as Madras is concerned, being your university headquarters, you can do it and only you can do it. Owing to the shortness of time, in the hope that you will agree, I am sending you some useful papers — articles and speeches. You will see that the author of some of them is none other than our admirable Jyoti.

"If you indicate your response to Com. Dhame, he will communicate with us promptly. On hearing from you, we will go ahead with the necessary arrangements."

Chandru was very much impressed with the letter and he decided to take up the challenge. But he had to finish the jobs in hand. There were two stories waiting to be typed and posted along with a longish two-part article. He had also to send a synopsis of his new book to his publishers. He hoped he would not have to leave within ten days and when he mentioned the subject to Dhame, he said that it would be easy to fix the dates suitable to him.

Vinayak, the servant at home, told Chandru that his master had been asking for him. Chandru was also in a mood for relaxation and he had dinner that night with the Ghoshes. They had started talking to him in Bengali and he was also keen to refresh his knowledge. Now, forced to do so by Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh (whom he had begun to call 'Mama' and 'Mami' responding to their great affection) he was able to speak with some fluency.

Starting with his preoccupation with his studies, gradually he began to refer to his past. Their great sympathy moved him so deeply that Chandru eventually opened up and disclosed to them the tragic chapter of his life. He did not hide his sentiments about Sundari and how he came to know Nani and how he had now to live his secret double life.

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Both Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh heard him with rapt attention. Only then they realized the personal grief in Chandru's story and they felt that Nani's coming into his life was a saving grace. Old and orthodox people, they were not in favour of unconventional arrangements, but admitted that Chandru had to avoid causing unhappiness to his family. They were indeed surprised over the complex character of the events which had shaped Chandru's young life and could not help laughing over the incredibly fortuitous role that had fallen on Dr. Manuel. For their part, they said, they would keep Nani with them after she came with her baby to Bombay.

"Well, Gowrima", Mr. Ghosh said turning to his wife. "You have been grumbling all your life you don't have a son and daughter-in-law. Here they are — a finer pair you may not see."

"Let me tell you a secret, Chandru," Mrs. Ghosh said lowering her tone. "The old man has been the greatest miser living and is even now sitting pretty on a lot of money. Why don't you speak up, Pappa ? The poor boy is feeling that he will be a burden to you."

"Yes, Chandru", the old man said. "She is not wrong. I have some money and it will be enough to go on with."

"He has a few lakhs and he says 'enough to go on with'," Mrs. Ghosh exclaimed.

"Anyway, that is settled now," Mr. Ghosh said raising his voice. "You bring her here as soon as you can and we shall make the necessary arrangements."

This was the longest conversation Chandru had with the Ghoshes before he left for Madras two weeks later. He plunged into his schedule tightly drawn up by himself. There was first the synopsis for his new book which he simply called "The Enemy Within : a study of the lop-sided economies of the colonies". As he began writing, it came to an

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undue length — 30 pages of typed matter — but he decided to let it go. He hoped to get an advance on the book which would keep him going till the book itself came out. There were one or two stories also on which he had been working and he completed and posted them. He also took the opportunity of the two articles he was writing to make them a curtain-raiser on the growing student movement. It became a two-part article under the heading : "Reaching it to the Masses" of which the first part would be on "The Need for a simple language" and the second, "Forging new instruments." The articles appeared a few days before his arrival in Madras and had aroused considerable public interest as was shown by a number of letters to the Editor on the subject.

Two days before Chandru was due to leave, a big envelope came from Dr. Manuel. He opened it most anxiously and was delighted to read the note that Nani was in perfect health "as you can see from the enclosed photograph." Dr. Manuel also said : "Your great girl refuses to be photographed alone." It was a beautiful photograph of Nani with Dr. Manuel standing by her side. Nani with her big eyes and sensuous lips looked beautiful with a happy smile.

Chandru was thrilled and was proud. If he had achieved nothing else, he could at least boast that he had one thing to his credit — the transformation of a servant girl into a girl to quote the great Dr. Patwardhan. There was confidence and poise on her face.

He hurriedly went to Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh and, saying that he wanted to share his joy with them, he showed them the photograph. The old man put on his spectacles and went near the window for full light to see it. Then he called his wife : "Come and see this beautiful picture."

"Well, Chandru," he said. "This photograph will not be your private property. It will be duly framed and will be hung right here in our drawing room."

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He laughed loudly and thumped Chandru on the back. "Now we have to wait for the day when this lovely girl will be here."

A bigger surprise was due to come for Chandru before he left for Madras. His train was due to leave in the evening and he was busy packing in the morning, wearing only his dhoti and a banian in typical south Indian style, when who should walk in unannounced but the person he had been longing to see — Jyoti. He was picking up things from the table near the window to be put into his box when he found two arms round his head with palms tight over his eyes. He felt the hands and knew at once and turned to see Jyoti smiling at him.

He could not resist the temptation to embrace her tightly, while Jyoti whispered : "Get off, wolf."

Chandru said : "You nearly gave me a heart attack, Jyoti. From where the devil did you land up ? I have two guardians here. Did they see you ?"

"No," Jyoti said. "Not a soul. Vinay — that is your Dhame — had given me your address and I found the door open. Then I stepped in and found this door open. Open doors everywhere today!"

"Well, you are a stunner, Jyoti," Chandru said looking at her in surprise and joy.

"Tell me how you got this wonderful place — an ivory tower in the jungle. It does look fine here and you look fine, Chandru. Of course, you have never looked anything else to me."

"Thanks to the Ghoshes," he said and added a few words in Bengali.

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Jyoti burst out laughing. "Where did you pick up that? You seem to have travelled far, all in three or four months."

They heard a cough and standing at the door were old man Ghosh and his wife looking in amazement.

"We heard a girl's voice and came to see," Mr. Ghosh explained.

"Come in, Mama," Chandru said. "Jyoti, this is Mr. Ghosh and this is my dear Mami. They have given me a home here. This is Asha Jyoti Ganguly, one of my comrades in politics".

"Your face seems familiar, but I haven't seen you before. Wait a minute," Mr. Ghosh said. "Are you by any chance related to Bhupen — Bhupen Ganguly of Ballygunge, near the triangular park?"

"You are right, sir, I am his grand-daughter."

"I knew, I knew," the old man said happily. "Jhoolu, Jhoolu — weren't you called Jhoolu if I am not mistaken? Must be a long, long time ago. I never forget a face. After I came to Bombay, I was on a visit to Calcutta and called on Bhupen. We were very dear friends. Then I think he was holding you by hand. Somehow, that picture has stuck to me. You were a toddler, a pretty child, very pretty. Yes, of course, I can see the family face. It all comes back to me."

"Isn't she beautiful now, Mama?" Chandru said laughing.

"You young fellows nowadays do a lot of flirting. She is beautiful. Which Bengali girl is not beautiful? Now, tell me that."

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Mr. Ghosh turned and said : "This room is too cramped for us. Let us go into our room. Come Jhoolu, Bhupen's grand-daughter, eh !"

They all walked into Mr. Ghosh's drawing room when Jyoti narrated how she came to Bombay.

"I came early this morning and went to Vinay to find out Chandru's address and straight came here. My main luggage is being taken to the ship by Cooks. I have one or two bags with me. They are in the taxi. I am sailing for England day after tomorrow. I wanted to spend some time with Chandru and friends before leaving. I am very happy I have seen you and grandma."

"What a pity!" the old man said. "Chandru is leaving today for Madras."

"Ridiculous," Jyoti exclaimed. "How is this ? How did you fix it up ?"

Mr. Ghosh said : "Jhoolu, my child, if you know Chandru well, take it from me, all plans are made for him, ready made. He has no hand in them. For two weeks, he has been doing nothing but bang bang on the type-writer. My poor ear-drums ! They have been having a hard time, but we have borne it all since we didn't want to come between him and his God ! Ha ha, poor Chandru, the victim of his talents."

"Why are you going to Madras, Chandru ?" asked Jyoti. "Vinay didn't tell me that."

"There is a students' gathering," Chandru said. "I don't know whether you heard about it."

"Heard ? My word, they tried to hook me. I said 'nothing doing' and went about with my arrangement. Old Man G..... was upset, but came down to earth pretty soon

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when I reminded him of the wise old adage : "Bend, not break." So, they caught you ?"

Chandru said that he accepted the idea after a great deal of thought. But if he had known that Jyoti was coming, he would have suggested a postponement.

"Who the devil could know you were so gullible ? I thought you were stuck here with Dhame."

"It was a surprise for me too," Chandru said. "I had a letter giving me the option, but I chose to take it. You can't blame me. You could have written to me. Anyway, I am stuck with my programme. We have a meeting on Monday and I have been asked to reach Madras on Monday morning — not later, not earlier ! The way they plan out things ! Dhame gave me instructions and it was like a military order."

"That will be so, more and more, unless you put your back up," Jyoti said. "They tried the stunt with me and I was a fool for some time running like you. I can tell you, that is how things are done. I am not too sure I am going to England on my own. I may know that only when I reach there."

As Jyoti took only tea, tea was specially brought for her. The others had their breakfast and coffee. There was a sense of hurry all round as Chandru had to leave and he had a lot of clearing up to do.

Between them, Jyoti and Chandru were most disappointed and it was writ large on their faces. Ultimately, Jyoti confessed that the blame was hers as she could have got in touch with Chandru earlier.

She said she would help Chandru to pack as they rose. Then she saw the photograph.

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"Who are these, Mama," she asked Mr. Ghosh. "Your daughters ?"

"No, just friends." Saying that, he looked at Chandru. Jyoti noted that and asked turning to Chandru : "Know them ?"

"I told you at Hyderabad, you remember ?" Chandru remarked with more meaning in his eyes than in his words.

"O yes, I remember now," Jyoti said and walked up to near the picture and looked at it for some time.

Then she saluted the old couple with folded hands to say good-bye and came with Chandru to his room.

"A really beautiful girl, Chandru," she whispered. "Your would-be child's would-be mother ! I am not sorry for myself, Chandru. It is something to see another girl happy and happiness is written all over her face, happiness and pride."

"Dear Jyoti' remember ?" Chandru said looking at her meaningfully. "What shall I say ? She is a child, very intelligent, very shrewd, but a child. Well....."

Then he briefly told Jyoti about Nani's illness and her narrow escape and also about the doctor.

"Chandru, life is not all that cruel to you. But you have to be careful. You make women fall in love with you. I am in total danger myself. I am glad I saw that girl's picture. I hope some day, I shall meet her."

They chatted for a few minutes and obviously, Jyoti wanted to get away. She stood up and looked at him and, smiling, said to herself apparently without meaning : "It is

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no use." Then she suddenly caught him in a bear hug and whispered into his ear : "Till death do us part."

He wanted to go down and see her off. But she gently pushed him back at the door and closed it behind her. As he was looking out from his window, she turned to him and waved.

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CHAPTER 11

Chandru's entry into politics was through the Students' conference in the south although he himself regarded it as a purely non-political affair. The avowed object of the entire movement, according to him, was to free students from politics and develop it as a kind of youth movement free from it.

But there was an inevitable pattern about such activities which made distinctions of one kind and another insignificant. He noted with surprise and regret that an enormous publicity build-up was being given to him. Beginning from the Bombay railway station where he was garlanded by a big crowd, and right through the journey to Madras, at important stations, he was hearing the familiar slogans raised for political leaders like Chandrasekhar Zindabad and Chandrasekhar-ki-jai and so on. The Communist party was under ban and he concluded that all these demonstrations had been ingeniously organised by party workers without the flag.

At Madras, he was received by another big crowd with garlands and slogans. All this was distressing to him for the simple reason that, if any serious work had to be done, it could not be by creating any kind of mass hysteria. It might be all right for the kind of political struggle for independence launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Chandru's purpose was to work quietly for a country-wide organisation which would free students from political involvements and, at the same time, prepare them for national work of far-reaching importance. Elaborating on this theme, the President had sent him a number of notes and articles with a few speeches of regional campaigners. Chandru could identify some of these as Jyoti's by their vigorous style and appeals to youth.

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He had a further shock when various students from different centres of the southern Provinces met him according to the programme prepared for him. He called on them to express their views before he could tell them what he had to. It was only then he realized the hopelessly unrealistic character of the work that had been done. The speeches of local student leaders were of a standard character, all of them centering on the Russian revolution and the need for students to be prepared to die if necessary for the cause which, to them, was the over-throwing of the imperialists by force.

The tenor of the speeches led Chandru to conclude that, if the British C.I.D. and police meant to take them seriously, they would have all been arrested and taken to jail. But the speeches were so ridiculous, apparently the speakers had been so badly tutored that the authorities had wisely decided to leave these student groups to make fools of themselves without the help of the police.

Chandru decided that any comments he had to make should be addressed to the President who had got him there and there was no use wasting his time preaching anything to these students. But he wanted to give them some food for thought so that they could at least be made to open their eyes to facts affecting them rather than the Soviet Union.

Accordingly, Chandru told them that students must think for themselves and not merely repeat talking points supplied to them by whoever they might be. "We don't become big by talking about the Soviet Union and the Communist International. They are there, quite important, but we are neither fit nor are we the right people to speak about them."

"Your first job," he said, "is only to look at your own country, and your own town and college. If you know how to organise yourself, assess your own problems locally and

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form active study groups, your work would have begun. This may appear to be unimpressive. It will be high-sounding to talk about the revolution and the Soviet Union, of Marx and Engels and the rest of them, thinkers and philosophers. I recollect a poem someone has written about everyone in a town clamouring for international amity while neighbours were not on speaking terms."

So, with parables and in simple sentences, Chandru made it clear to them that student bodies must find their own topics for study and discussion. He said he was going to suggest a leaders' conference a little later to give training for such work in different university areas.

For the rest, he said, he wished to make some points at the evening public meeting and he would welcome them to send to the Central office their comments and suggestions so that they could be the basis for future discussions.

The setting for the evening meeting left him aghast, being indistinguishable from that for a massive political rally. Loud speakers had been fixed up and the Marina beach was packed with people, not all of them students. A popular local politician had been requested to preside and introduce Chandru to the audience.

Chandru decided that his first major theme should be de-politicalisation of the student movement. Otherwise, he told himself, it would be self-defeating from the start. He was not one of those "professional" public speakers with the necessary sartorial equipment to make an impression. He had found everywhere people, even young people, wearing pyjamas, long shirts, jawahar jackets and either the white "Gandhi cap" or some other cap, the general make-up for platform appearances.

He came to the meeting in his dhoti and a simple white shirt. No one took notice of him till he came to the centre of the dais and saluted the crowd with folded hands in the

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national style. Chandru's height, his head generally held high with a slight upward tilt of the chin and his bright eyes marked him out to be a noteworthy figure in any crowd and when this vast audience saw him on the platform, a big cheering broke out. Some one raised the slogan Chandrasekhar-ki-jai and it went the rounds from group to group. The President then introduced Chandru in a brief speech.

The Marina beach in Madras was the best part of the city for a public meeting and six in the evening was the best time of the day for it. When Chandru rose to speak, after an initial cheering, the noise died down. In a calm, steady tone, he began by confessing to a sense of surprise that what should really be a meeting of students had now taken the shape of a popular rally. And so far as his right to speak to them was concerned, he could only say that he was a student and would like to share his thoughts with fellow-students and others who cared to know what the younger generation was looking for.

He was not there to make a political speech, he said. In a big country like India engaged from end to end in a struggle for freedom, it was difficult to escape politics. But, as students, they had to take an interest in the goings on today, and not only in politics, for they would be the citizens of tomorrow and they would be called upon to face a world which might be different.

"I shall bypass politics. Our great leader Mahatma Gandhi has called on students not to get involved in politics. Politics can mean anything. We should concern ourselves with basic fundamental matters which lie at the root of all politics, the welfare of you and me and our future generations.

"I would like to say that it is not politics when we feel for the millions of poor in this country. It is not politics when young people of my generation turn their thoughts to the dumb millions of India who toil in heat and dust from morning to dusk and they know not where the fruits of

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their labour go. You see the big factories in the cities and proprietors and managers go in swell cars and hear the wheels and belts move in the factories with their rumble and tumble. To them, God is in his Heaven and all is well with the world. But take those men, away and I would add women, whom you see, half-dressed, tired and emaciated like the others — take those mute toiling workers away, what are these factories ? They are cement and stone, aweful in their silence. The V.I.P.s can stop and ponder. They can do nothing, for, Comrades, their power is not with them but with those hundreds and thousands of half-fed men and women who toil and produce their wealth. They are the wealth of this nation — these workers who know no caste, no class, but only toil, dust and hunger.

"It is of them we have to think and plan — how can we serve them ? It is politics to organise meetings and committees and pass resolutions and hold conferences with Governors and the Viceroy and pass comments on them. We do not want to join these activities. We want to pass our examinations, for, let us not forget, primarily we are students and then we become citizens and we want jobs. But we also want to be intelligent and honest citizens to serve our fellow men and women.

"I appeal to my student friends to spread out as far as they can, to see and to know and, while they build their own health and their knowledge, feed their mind with the will to pity and help those who are not as well off as they and who, in the eyes of God and man, are entitled to everything we have, just as they are entitled to the grace of the sun, the caress of the breeze and the smell and sight of gardens and flowers.

"And I pledge my word that we will stand by them. For every one student who is here, there are ten thousand boys and girls who cannot go to school and do not know what a school means and are content to wait for the day when they will give their thumb-print receipts for the below-minimum wage they are to be paid by those big managers.

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We are not men and women but beasts if we don't take the pledge that we shall strive for a bright morning for those millions who are not with us. I hope you will join me in giving this pledge to them — my beloved student comrades and respected citizens."

For a moment, it seemed, the audience was in a spell for no one stirred. His magnetic ringing voice held them captive and Chandru's heart was throbbing for, as he said, he was not a politician and he meant every word of what he said. He stood there while cheering and hand-claps broke out, his eyes glistening and his face flushed.

He was choked by the mobbing crowd, but thanks to his unpretentious dress, he wriggled through and reached his residence before his companions came. They saw him lying down as if he was exhausted. Actually, he was excited and wanted to talk — yes, talk but not to them but to Jyoti who, he knew, would just look at him and smile whenever she approved of what he had said.

Later, he got up and wrote a long letter to the President who had sent him on his mission there and addressed it to Dhame. It was a highly emotional letter saying that it would be impossible for him immediately to put down his reactions to his meetings with the students. He was also not sure whether his speech would be an embarrassment to the party.

"You have put me in a position where it is not easy for me, at any rate, to make a stage-play. So, please pardon me if I have gone off the track. I have made no plea for the party but I have said nothing to harm it. In a sense, I am afraid, my way of thinking passes the leadership from our hands to those who should react and act on their own. This to my mind is pure communism. If I am off the track, then I cannot be a Communist as I understand communism. I am leaving Madras for a brief holiday and have requested our friends to note the points I made and forward

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to you a draft programme of action. I shall send you a note on return to Bombay."

There was one party volunteer who had been left there to be of help to him. Chandru told him that his work for the moment in Madras was over and, as he did not want to waste any more time there, he wished to leave. He collected his bag and bed roll and, after asking him to convey his thanks to party friends, he took a rickshaw and went to the railway station. It was quite late and the last train was about to leave and it was going to Cochin. Chandru hurriedly got a ticket and as he took his seat in the train, he thought: "That is nice. In one sense, Cochin is the land's end where from the harbour I can see the ships sailing the high seas."

At Cochin, crowded with people, he lodged in a small hotel. That evening, he got into conversation with a fellow lodger whose description of the sad life of workers in the plantations prompted him to take a bus early next morning to a small out-of-the-way town and then find his way to the coolie lines of a tea plantation.

For nearly a week, Chandru wandered in the plantation areas lodging with the labourers and sharing their meagre rations. It was a new experience for him to live in huts which were nothing but bare walls with no doors and windows and nothing but thatched leaves for the roof. He was moved by pity for these forlorn people working for tea companies which had huge sales offices round the globe. Their only glory was the wonderful landscape of the hills with which he was thrilled. Tired and depressed after his unique experience, he found his way back to the hotel in Cochin, sworn to dedicate his life to the emancipation of what he called these "exploited communities."

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CHAPTER 12

It was only when Chandru returned to Cochin that he came to know of the impact of his exploits in Madras. He had literally run away from the city and had been cut off from the world during his brief but exciting tour of the plantations.

The reception when he came to his hotel took him by surprise. He had been a non-entity when he halted there before going to the plantations. But when he came back and asked for his room and his bed-roll from the hotel manager, the latter smiled and asked : "How long do you want to hide "

"What do you mean ?" queried Chandru. "Why should I hide ?"

"For nothing except this," the manager replied and took out from his drawer a sheaf of newspapers and pushed them to him. When Chandru saw his picture in some of the papers, he was embarrassed and asked the hotelier if he could have a glance at them in his room. He took the whole lot with him and the manager sent a boy up with his box and bed — now to a bigger and more comfortable room.

Chandru was surprised at the display in the newspapers of reports of his parleys in Madras and, more than everything, his Marina speech. "Student leader springs a surprise", "Appeal to students from youth leader", Student leader hits out against politicians" — these were some of the headlines he read.

Apart from lengthy reports of the speech and his address to the Central Conference of Students in the Southern Region, the newspapers carried his personal story about his giving up the I.C.S. the denial of the Empire Association scholarship and his Leftist sympathies in which connection reference was made to his 'authentic" and "well-researched" book

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"Unearned Income and Sweated Labour" presenting in a "graphic form' the corrosion of the Indian economy by foreign exploitation.

"No politician can long for anything more, but I am not a politician and, at least for some years, I would certainly like to be left alone." With that thought in his mind, he put the papers away.

Chandru's summing-up of the Madras episode to his parents on return to Bombay took a light vein and he said that they must have concluded that, having become an important politician, their son had not written or come down to see them.

"Really, dear father," Chandru wrote, "I was afraid to come. I have begun a lot of work here about which I shall write to you at leisure and, if I came down home, I would never have had the heart to leave. I would have been miserable with nothing to do and I don't want to take up the college job. I have your blessings and I want to make something of myself so that nobody can taunt you and mother, 'Your son gave up the I.C.S. and see what has happened !"

"Now they cannot say that. Everyone must have seen the crazy publicity the papers gave me. As it is, I have a feeling — I do not know if I am jubilant or frightened — I have jumped miles ahead of the I.C.S. My writing work is shaping well. I have not yet made a firm choice about my political line, but I think I am going along the right path so that some day people may say of me, 'He gave up everything to serve the poor and the down-trodden.'

"You can imagine how deeply I want to see you all and be in your midst again. But I shall wait. I shall write at leisure to mother, Cheenu and Charu.

Your affectionate son
CHANDRU

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His letter to Nani was less difficult to write. It was couched in the most affectionate tone, full of his love for Her, and said that she could understand why he could not come down and see her.

Chandru's life in Bombay after his return from Madras seemed to be a sequence of dramatic developments. He had an urgent letter from the President who was then in Calcutta asking him to go over. In view of his work in Madras, he wrote, many party men were wanting to meet him urgently. Chandru was rather agitated by this letter as he had become fond of his leader, when a solution came in a very timely and characteristically stimulating letter from Jyoti. It was from London and even before he opened the envelope, he recognised the hand-writing. She seemed to write in a furious hurry though it did not affect her steadiness or legibility. He eagerly opened it with the round smiling face of Jyoti in his mind.

"My most beloved incorrigible C.," Jyoti wrote. "I saw the press reports at India House. You were just d-d wonderful. This is to remind you that urgent invitations will come for 'conferences'. Avoid them like the plague and keep the initiative with you. You can trust Vinay to the extent of his own knowledge. We are friends and I have written to him. When are you coming to London ? Your adoring — J."

Extraordinary prescience ! Chandru was amazed. He ran to Dhame (He noticed that she always referred to Dhame as Vinay — his full name, Chandru learnt, was Vinayak Ram Dhame) and showed him Jyoti's letter as well as the President's. Dhame looked at him as if to say : "Why is Jyoti bringing me into all this ?" and said pontifically, very unusual for him : "Hurry in politics can be disastrous. You have just come back and you have to look back a bit too. You will have to find your own arguments for your reply to the President."

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Chandru had his cue. He replied to the President with elaborate politeness saying he would like to hasten slowly on his politics and, since he had already done whatever he was asked to do and had sent a full report, he should be allowed to get back to his routine. He did not hear from the President in reply.

But replies came from home and these were on expected lines. Expressing relief on hearing from him, his father said : "I do not understand the character and implications of this life and I hope you will not get hurt. Your mother is quite anxious, so you had better write and assure her."

His father also mentioned the receipt of Rs. 2,000 from the Calcutta publishers.

The letter from Charu was full of fury. "I saw your letter to father and know how, unable to face me and Cheenu, you quietly said you would write to us *at leisure* ! You can never explain why you could not find two or three days to run down to Trivandrum from Madras."

The tone changed thereafter.

'But, dear Anna, don't be upset. We are not angry, but only sorry since we know you must have had problems. I have been expecting a long letter from you, but probably your book-writing is keeping you very busy. But do write, Anna. I do not like the feeling that you are drifting away from us though this seems now to be the truth. I read your speeches. What ideas you have propounded ! I am frightened to imagine you are becoming a revolutionary. What else can all this mean ? It is thrilling to read all those sentiments — the poor and the down-trodden and what not. You sound like Lenin and Stalin — that is what they say, for I have never read Lenin and Co. Raghu was here — you must see to believe, Anna — in a tweed coat paying us a patronising visit and he said that you would soon join the Gandhi camp or the Communist camp — 'most probably

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the latter 'he said and then he will break laws and cannot escape going to jail.' I wanted to give a good slap on his cheek. Dear Anna, it pains me to think how you helped this ass."

"You will be glad to know," she continued, "your devoted admirer keeps close track of your movements and she it was who gave us a good description of your Madras speech. It seems that, on seeing the notice in the papers, she went to the Marina beach as she wanted to see you and hear you speak. And this is what she writes : 'You will not believe me, Charu, Chandru looked so tall, so handsome, though he was wearing only a simple shirt and dhoti, while others wore big coats and caps and all. There was pin-drop silence when he spoke. I was almost in the front row. His ringing voice was in a tremor when he spoke of toil and dust and hunger and I felt he might cry, his voice was so high-pitched, but he was in full control of himself. I was so proud, dearest Charu. What can I say? May God bless him and take care of him, for I am sure, he has chosen the path of danger and suffering."

Charu also mentioned that Sundari's husband would be going to England shortly. He had already applied for admission to Oxford and would be leaving soon. He would also try his luck at the I.C.S. examination in London.

Chandru had also a letter from his publishers that their Reader was happy with the Synopsis of his second book and they would suggest his hurrying up with it. For a new author, it was always best to keep his name in the public eye. From their side, they promised fair remuneration as they had now an idea of the public response to his writings. Being totally ignorant of how authors were paid, he was quite happy with the letter. After all, they had already paid him Rs. 4000 (in two instalments) on his earlier book which, he felt, was generous.

His work on the second book began, therefore, with a good measure of optimism. He stuck to the original title

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he had chosen : "The Enemy Within : A Study of the lop-sided Economies of the Colonies." Blood transfusion from the weak to the strong, he said to himself.

He hoped to make the book a fully factual and unprejudiced study, a piece of pure research without any kind of propaganda. When he began planning his study on the basis of the synopsis, which had been largely a document of assumptions and projections with just enough details to give the publishers an idea of the book, he found there were interesting implications. Firstly, facts had to be gleaned about not only India but other colonies. This was not an easy job. Secondly, although he proposed and was genuinely committed to be objective, the fact remained that colonial interests naturally conflicted with national interests and this would mean that the book was bound to be categorised as "anti-imperialist" and, therefore, and, for no other reason, pro-Communist, however accurately the data might have been collected and presented. Also as it would mean referring to economic forces within the country aiding foreign exploiters, the book would definitely be regarded as pro-Communist.

There were also complications about the source material. Official documents of the Government of India would be available from the Central Government sources, the Legislative Council Library in Delhi, the National Library, etc. and some economic journals published in Calcutta and London, but these were all what seemed to him to be negative sources". They generally presented the obverse view and he had to find out where the thieves lay hidden and bring them out. They were, however, the only sources for material on such a project. To counteract these, he would have to get material from what he might call anti-imperialist sources, generally-speaking Russian. Russian publications, he knew, were heavily unbalanced and their figures could not be relied upon and the publications were in the Russian language. The best possible course would, therefore, be the negative propagandists — Germans writing

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on British Empire economics and the British writing on German and other continental countries and their empires.

Chandru was thrilled to come to the conclusion that his book could, therefore, be a pioneering effort. For the moment, he would keep the idea under his hat, for he could not proceed without a preliminary survey of the research material available.

This book project made it imperative that he must keep away from any political activity of the kind the comrades of the Communist party wanted to drag him into. He decided to consult Dhame as Jyoti had advised, because, to begin with, Dhame would help him with an idea of the available literature.

Dhame's advice to him was to start studying Russian urgently. He said he could not make any progress on the subject unless he knew Russian. He would put him in touch with a very top secret source who would help him on a rapid course in Russian which Moscow had developed for foreigners and, in three months, he should be able to talk, read and write and manage to use the language for his purpose. Dhame spoke as if he had received instructions since, normally on serious matters, he never exercised any initiative. Chandru asked him bluntly who had put him to this. Dhame smiled : "You ask funny questions, young fellow. That crazy girl, Jyoti, has written to me. Now, no more questions."

His anxiety to pursue his studies and Jyoti's advice (which he felt must have a lot of significance) kept Chandru immersed in this adventure of a super-fast course in Russian. He had to work practically round the clock. Since he had found favourable response from Editors to his articles and stories which also meant hardly-needed money, both for Nani and also for his parents (the latter for psychological reasons) he could not relax on this front also.

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Apart from these articles, he also worked on a theme for a political novel which could appear in a weekly series instead of his fortnightly short stories. Since the Editor himself had suggested this earlier, he did not expect that this change would present any problem.

It was, therefore, something of a shock to him when one day, coming home after his Russian class, Dhame told him that there was to be influx of partymen into Bombay in a week or so and he must be prepared for a meeting with them. Chandru anticipated that, if they came to Bombay, he might get tied up one way or the other with them and he might be forced to take decisions. This was not very much of a problem, however, for he had already made it clear to the President that the contribution he could make to the party was limited by his peculiar personal circumstances and, if his pace was forced, he would have no alternative but to withdraw totally which, honestly, he did not want to do. Also, he had been forewarned about points of danger. The problem was really how far and how fast he would be with the party or, to put it less bluntly, in politics.

It was not a surprise when some days later Dhame informed him that the President, who had arrived two days previously, wanted to meet him. He had asked Dhame what Chandru was doing and he had informed him about his Russian and the new book. The President was very happy, Dhame said.

Chandru met the President with enthusiasm, but the latter told him that he was getting complaints from party men that Chandru was taking the line of Jyoti and, while doing good work, he was not holding up the party flag. After all, the party had to grow and young people should not be shy of it.

Chandru was at a loss to know what to say when the President himself said that there was going to be a party meeting at which many of the youth leaders had been asked

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to come. Chandru told him that he would be happy to come, but he should not be asked to speak since he had nothing new to say. He could not come into politics yet, as he had already explained, but was willing to undertake any writing work necessary.

Chandru found this meeting memorable for one particular reason. He met there a young revolutionary who greatly impressed him. Introducing him, the President called him "one of our extraordinary young men our society will have to reckon with in the future." His name was Konda Venkatakrishnayya but they called him Venkat — a massive rugged fellow in soiled clothes with hair and beard half covering his face. He was from a well-to-do Telugu-speaking family on the Hyderabad border. He was a student of the Andhra University in the senior classes when he was attracted by some party men. Involved and caught in a clash with the police, he was tortured and, though barely nineteen at the time, he did not break and the police could get nothing from him about any of his comrades. Finally, he went to jail for a year and underwent untold suffering. When he came out a wreck, his family refused to have anything to do with him. Out in the wilderness, he took refuge with some peasant workers and when he told them the story, they were moved by pity and they gave him shelter.

It dawned on him that this might be an opportunity to speak to them about their own plight. The reaction was extraordinary.

"When I told them in rough, simple words," Venkat himself told the meeting, "how they lived and how others who profited from their labours lived and why all this happened, their eyes opened. Perhaps, it was my appearance and my condition which gave weight to my words. Then I moved to another village and the story thus spread from village to village. I have covered forty villages and I can tell you that, while they are quiet and carry on as before, they are angry men. We have only to get ready an organi-

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sation and a programme to get them to act. In fact, we have the nucleus imperceptibly small no doubt, of a land army ready to march against exploiters of the poor and the hungry toiling people."

As Chandru had requested, the President put forward Chandru's case. The reception, Chandru found, was mixed, whereupon he himself stood up and spoke. If he had not been able to convince them of his bona fides so far, he said, he would never be able to do so and he would leave politics. He was, by temperament and inclination, a student and a writer and it would be best if he confined himself to his own career.

Chandru's challenging tone had the necessary effect and some of the critics toned down and said that their concern was only to ensure his co-operation and not to antagonise him. At the end, it was decided that Chandru must organise a conference of young workers in different fields and having been impressed by his strong and blunt speech, Venkat came forward to offer full co-operation to him.

But circumstances developed in such a way that the idea could not be pursued. He had very sad news from Dr. Manuel that Nani had a miscarriage and, in order to save her life, they had to carry out a caesarian operation. It was only when Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh explained to him how kind God had been that Chandru realised the danger Nani had been in. He was in great distress over the development.

A letter from the publisher soon after asking him to expedite the book came as a relief. He wrote back to them that the book would have to be printed in four or five parts as he found that all the material required was not immediately available. He hoped to get the first part of about 100 pages ready in three months. In all, he expected the book would take a little less than a year. He sought an advance to enable him to carry on in the meanwhile.

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Chandru reduced his other commitments though these brought him a regular income and, in about six weeks, in half the time he had asked for himself, he sent the first part of the book. In the meanwhile, through Mr. Dhame, he conveyed to the President a request that he would want his help to go to Moscow for two or three months to pursue his work on this important project. He sent him a copy of the synopsis. He did not hear from him for a long time, but almost when he was completing his first part, Chandru got a reply from him that the Moscow university had offered to extend all co-operation for his work and since he had already completed a preliminary course in Russian, it would simplify his job.

During these months, Chandru had been keeping in touch with his parents. They were now reconciled to his absence and Cheenu was engaging their attention. He had only a few months more for his M. Sc. and Chandru learnt that he had contacted the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and they had agreed to take him as a research scholar if he came through his university with distinction. Cheenu was very hopeful. Charu would be going for her B.A. (Hons.) in the next academic year and she had taken the same subjects as Chandru for her degree course. She wrote a private letter to Chandru that he should write to his parents to postpone her marriage till the end of her academic career.

Since his Moscow trip was coming off for certain, he wrote to Nani that she might have to abandon her plan of joining him in Bombay. But an unexpected problem arose as Dr. Manuel had a U.S. foundation award for a year's refresher course in Ohio and she wrote to Chandru that, if he could manage to keep Nani in Bombay, it would be convenient for all concerned. Nothing was more welcome to Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh. Accordingly, Nani came escorted by Dr. Manuel herself when she was coming to Bombay to take her boat.

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Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh joined Chandru to greet the two women coming after a long journey from Trivandrum. Leaving her past far behind, Nani was now in a First Class coupe compartment travelling with Dr. Manuel. She seemed to fill the role perfectly, for, as Chandru saw her, he was filled with joy. Nani seemed to be a beautiful woman showing no evidence of her recent experience. Mrs. Ghosh embraced her and she seemed to be very happy to see Chandru's wife. Chandru merely pressed her hand, but his gaze convinced her that her 'noble master' loved her at least as well as when she was in Trivandrum.

They drove to Mr. Ghosh's place where arrangements had been made for all. But, with profuse apologies, Dr. Manuel moved to a hotel as she had to make numerous arrangements and meet people since her ship was due to sail in two days. Dr. Manuel called Chandru aside and told him that, because of the Caesarian, an operation had to be performed on Nani so that she would not have to face another pregnancy and it was her hope that the operation could be reversed after some time. She warned him that Nani did not know about it. She was not informed because she had been very eager to have the child and any such news might shock her. Dr. Manuel parted from Nani affectionately embracing and kissing her. Chandru attributed Nani's social elevation to her intrinsic qualities which had evidently won for her Dr. Manuel's great affection.

That night, Nani informed Chandru that she had appeared for the Cambridge Senior School Leaving Examination as a private candidate. Dr. Manuel had secretly arranged for her to go to Madras for it. Chandru was amazed to hear about this coup by the two women and wondered how they had managed it all. Chandru had a suspicion that the miscarriage might be due to the enormous strain Nani must have undergone in the preparation for the examination and also the rail journey to Madras, but he tactfully refrained from making any reference to it.

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"After you left, Master, and when we moved into our house, Dr. Manuel arranged an Anglo-Indian tutor to put me on a regular drill for eight to ten hours daily and I learnt in less than six months what normally a girl would have taken a year or more. Dr. Manual got all the information about the Cambridge examination and the teacher did the rest. That lady would not allow me to talk in any language but English.

"I was so well that I was fit to travel alone though Dr. Manuel insisted on the Anglo-Indian teacher accompanying me to Madras. We stayed in the Y.M.C.A. and after I finished the exam., I went to the Marina beach to see the place where you had addressed your first public meeting in Madras."

It was less than two years since he had set eyes on this girl and admired her beautiful eyes and her finely-shaped body. Not long after, he discovered that, though born poor and earning her wages at 18 as a menial, she had charm and intelligence and more than everything else, had a quality which endeared her to everyone. How could he explain otherwise the manner in which Dr. Manuel had taken to her as if to a daughter? There was no reason why the doctor should have shown her all this kindness unless Nani had won her love as she had won his. Thinking back, he felt that it was not merely physical attraction which had brought them together from the first. She had her physical charms of course, but it was her intelligence and tact which sustained that attraction. When she became pregnant, he took it that their union was in some manner predestined and again, by her utter devotion and love for him, which she showed in many ways, he was completely won over and he thought of her as his wedded wife.

Like the wise girl she was, Nani did not spend all her time with him. She stuck to Mrs. Ghosh, picking up Bengali words and learning to dress in their style. She went out one day with Mrs. Ghosh who bought her one or

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two typical Bengali sarees. With the amber sindoor drawn back over the central parting of her hair and on her forehead, and her typical Bengali eyes, the Ghoshas would argue that this girl might have had Bengali ancestry. In fact, they began to love Nani as much as or more than they loved him. From being Chandru's wife, to the old couple, Chandru became their dear Nani's husband. They told Chandru that, after he went to Russia, they would take her to Calcutta with them for a holiday.

Chandru's novel had begun to appear in a weekly series which would provide for Nani's expenses for three months or a little more. Thereafter, Chandru said to himself, he would cross the bridge when he came to it.

Chandru's programme was not fully chalked out. He expected to spend some three months in Moscow and glean as much material as he could and then proceed, if possible, to London. Money was needed for all this touring and Chandru had to approach the President again through Dhame for help. The President said that, so long as Chandru stood by the party and was engaged in work useful to it, it was their duty to find him all assistance. There was a bit of sting in this benevolence, but beggars were no choosers. Chandru said he had made it clear to them how far he could go. On the other hand, he felt, he had convinced the leader that he was in reality a loyal, sincere and dedicated communist but had refused the label because it signified political fashions and mannerisms, which were not only ridiculous but, in the long run, unhelpful for the growth of communism. Only Jyoti had understood him. She had called him not a communist politician but a communist humanist. The picture Jyoti had of him should also have been brought home to the leader by his conduct and the presentation of his philosophy. Chandru felt that it was on a full appreciation of his political make-up that the President had decided to help him.

He had two important obligations to fulfil before he left for Russia. The first was the student get-together that

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had been decided upon. There was now no time for his active participation in it. He prepared several documents and a speech to be delivered as the key-note address to be read by whomsoever the President might invite to take on the leadership. Chandru sent them to the President saying that, since he was going to be away, these papers could be presented to the conference if he approved of them. Chandru also worked out the logistics for the conference, the status of the participants, the formation of committees and the setting-up of a central body and so on.

His second and final important responsibility was to inform and take leave of his family. Now that Nani was in Bombay, he had no problem on that account. After tying up all the loose ends in Bombay, Chandru went for a fortnight's holiday with his parents. This was like a return to a past life for him. His twenty-fourth birthday had come and gone and he had not even remembered it and would have passed it by altogether but for the good wishes conveyed to him by Cheenu and Charu (and through the latter by Sundari) and Nani. His mother had called the pundits and the usual religious rituals had been gone through in their house, a day spent, however, in utter melancholy because of his absence.

His mother was in transport when he reached home without giving them advance notice. Charu embraced him and broke down though she was now a grown-up girl.

"Anna, have you left us for ever ?" she asked sobbing and was still crying when he sat cross-legged on the floor near his mother as in the old days. Stroking her head, Chandru exclaimed : "What is this, you big girl ? You are going to be married before long and then you are going to be on your own, aren't you ?"

Charu raised her face, her eyes in a flood and looked at him : "Are you married and have you gone away ?"

"What funny questions, Charu ?" Chandru laughed.

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"Let us see what comes. In the meanwhile, don't you want to hear about the interesting time I have been having." Charu's mood changed and she produced a smile. "You have become a politician. You are making magnificent public speeches and writing books."

"Oh Chandru, do you know what has happened? Raghu has passed the I.C.S. They took five people and he was the fifth. He came here and told father. And father gave back a present to him. That morning, the advance cheque for Rs. 5,000 had come from the Calcutta Publishers for your new book and father told him about it. Are you sorry, Chandru, you missed the I.C.S.?"

"Do I look like it, Charu? Do you think I have to be dis-appointed?" Chandru asked laughing. "Do you know, Charu, everywhere I go, people talk about the man who gave up the I.C.S. and I feel proud."

His father came back after his evening walk and stopped at the door on seeing Chandru. "O Chandru, What a surprise! When did you come? Why didn't you write?" He shot one question after another.

The saddest of all was his mother who did not know what to say or do. Her dear son was there, but that was not what was in her mind. She was agonised by the thought that he would be going away again soon. His father too, normally not very emotional, was now obviously under great stress. He had given considerable thought to what was happening to his son and this was not distressing or depressing. In fact, he had reason to be proud, but, in a rather selfish way, he felt sorry that his son was getting away from them.

Chandru had a delicate task. He had to leave them in as best a mood as possible. He regaled them with narratives about his experiences, the most exciting being the description of his visits to the tea estates. He gave a des-

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cription of the Ghoshes and how they had adopted him as a member of their family.

From his narrative, his parents felt that their son was becoming a Bohemian, mixing with all kinds of people, observing no caste rules, but somehow all that seemed logical to the life he was leading. He said he had not joined the Communist party and explained where exactly he differed from them. The narrative was so straightforward and so convincing that his parents, not to speak of the younger folk, agreed with him, incidentally giving their sympathy to the philosophy of a mass uprising against tyranny, about which his father at one time would have raised his voice to the high heavens.

One way and another, in the course of a few days, Chandru associated his family so much with his life and his philosophy that they agreed with him. He mentioned to his mother that his marriage with Sundari might have perhaps changed his life or rather maintained the old life, but what had happened now? His life was extraordinary, nomadic, Bohemian and he would not have a family life of the traditional style. He was in politics. He was speaking to people about equality, social justice and the world said he was right. Young and old were finding wisdom in a changing world and he was a part of it. Sundari was everything, he said, he had longed for. She would have been the embodiment of everything perfect — beauty, intelligence, social grace and love. But she was married. She was another man's wife. And, for himself, he had seen in the course of the last few months some beautiful women, sparkling, charming companions in the world of his new ideas. There was a girl, a Bengali, who was now in England, whom he met in Hyderabad. He had not seen the like of her anywhere. They shared the same life, the same thoughts and he admired her and she admired him. Not that he was thinking of marriage or anything, Chandru said hurriedly, but he was only pointing out how life was changing.

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So, in many such provocative talks, Chandru gave them a picture of his new life. His father was moved greatly, affected by the manner in which his bright son was creating a new world for himself. He felt himself somehow irrelevent. He might have got peeved and angry at it. But he felt that his son was doing much better than men of his generation and how then could he tell him that he was wrong and he himself, with his old world thoughts, was right ?

Days had passed like hours when he returned to Bombay. He had only three days more on his native soil. He spent a lot of time with Nani.

Nani confided a secret to him on the last day, her head bent, tears brimming in her eyes, "How can I say it, but I must," she said in a whisper. "You must know. I can never have another child, my noble, beloved master," she said and burst into sobs.

"Why do you say that ?" Chandru asked gently.

"Dr. Manuel does not know that I know. They thought I was under anesthesia, but I wasn't, though, only semi-conscious. Dr. Manuel told her fellow doctors, two other women, that sterilisation had to be done. I would not be able to bear another child after the caesarian. They agreed. It was best it was done immediately, some one said. I did not quite understand, but when she said that I could not bear another child I knew.

"Two days later, I asked Dr. Manuel : 'Have you done the operation ? 'what operation' she asked in shocked surprise. (I do not know, you said some operation, 'I said. Then she asked : "Did I ?" and she looked at me to know whether I knew. I turned my face as if I was too weak. She said : 'O yes, all the necessary operation has been done. We have also taken the precaution to see that you will not get another child soon. Nowadays, surgery is a marvel.

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We can do an operation one day and change it another day.' But she did not know that I knew that sterilisation was final."

Chandru was utterly shocked and moved, not so much by the news — Dr. Manuel had already told him — but by the tremendous effect it had on her young mind, for Nani was only 19. He hugged her and said, "So long as we are there for each other, we should not worry about anything else."

"Yes," she said smiling through her tears.

Two days later, Chandru sailed in a P. & O. boat for Naples. From the top of the gangway, he turned and waved to Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh, Nani standing between them. He waved to her frantically. She did not wave back. She only saw a mist through her tears.

(End of Book II)

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CHAPTER 13

The London of his dreams !

Chandru noted the date : September 3, 1939 — a great day for him, yes, but he did not know that the world was being plunged into an era of darkness. The Second World War had started a few hours earlier.

Happy in his ignorance and smiling to himself, he watched the train slowly coming to a halt. He got down with his boxes in either hand and was about to put them on a trolley nearby when he heard running feet and looked round. As he turned, two arms were flung round his neck in a choking embrace. Then she turned her face to him and she was crying.

"At last," she gasped, "at last, you are here, my darling".

As she released him, Chandru said : ...

"You gave me such a shock, Jyoti. I was wondering what was happening to me in England."

Chandru was staring at her. She was wearing jeans and a gaberdeen rain-coat belted at the waist. She had slimmed giving an impression of height. She was smiling at him with her brilliant eyes full of their usual mirth.

"Well, have you had enough ?" she interposed and once again, they were in each other's arms.

"I can't believe it, Chandru. How I have longed and longed for this day."

"Jyoti, let us get out of here before we are charged with indecency in public," Chandru said laughing and took

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his boxes and put them on the trolley. They both walked to the exit.

Jyoti took charge thereafter. She hailed a cab and, in another twenty minutes, they were in Berwick Street, where Jyoti said, she had a "royal suite".

Jyoti's Royal Suite, Chandru found, was a large room on the second floor of an old building. It had a huge window looking on to the street. The room was furnished with taste with a six-foot long sofa upholstered in beautiful amber velvet and two ornate well-cushioned chairs. On one side, towards the corner was a cosy bed. There was a large roll-top desk which Jyoti evidently used as her writing table with all kinds of books and papers on it. Books were piled up everywhere, apart from those stacked on a tall shelf. There was at the farther corner, a big kitchen table with a rack fixed to it and, nearby, a refrigerator. There was a door adjoining it, apparently the toilet and bath.

Jyoti flung away her overcoat and Chandru saw her rich black hair, grown not too long but dropped down to the middle of the back. She wore a white shirt tucked into her grey jeans. She stared at him and smiled — and they came together.

Constantly in each other's mind for many months and now caught in consuming passion, they spent two days in an orgy of happiness, eating whatever they had in the room. Chandru felt that this was like the honeymoon wedded people talked about.

They came to themselves eventually and Jyoti said, "Let us go and have a look at the capital city of the Empire where the sun never sets. The London you are seeing, Chandru, is not the city I saw last year. London is now cloaked in grimness. For months, A.R.P. exercises have been going on. It is some months since the city began hearing the wail of sirens for practice. During the last three

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days we have been at war, there have been so many 'alerts' and 'all clears'. I didn't want to tell you and spoil our mood. Outside, London is covered by a pall of gloom. This is now a part of our life. But still, London is London and we shall go round."

"And you will have to eat too, Chandru. You have lost a lot of weight and, if I were to keep you from falling ill, I have to feed you."

There was nothing naive or subtle about Jyoti, but Chandru never imagined that there was a volcano hidden in her flippant exterior. It was not arrogance or audacity which made her so forth-right, but her conviction that Chandru was as attracted to her as she had been to him.

While she was dressing to go out, Chandru got up and had a hot shower. He wore the better of the two woollen suits he had made in Bombay and which had proved useless in Moscow. As he finished, he looked at Jyoti and could not believe the transformation that had taken place. She did not use much make-up, but her face was blooming and her shining eyes and her figure showing to advantage in a carefully draped saree, made her irresistible.

"We will go to the Indian Student's home where we can get some Indian lunch". Jyoti told him. "You have been in Moscow for six months and you are entitled to some home food, but be sure to call it home food," she laughed, "because that is the nearest you can have."

There were a number of Indians there, mostly students or scholars attached to universities. They did not meet anyone they knew. They ordered a mixed meal, Bengali, Punjabi and south Indian.

"This is indeed nice," Chandru said. "What I got in Moscow I could push down only by dissolving in vodka."

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"Very right," Jyoti whispered, her eyes twinkling. "That went for a whole lot of other things too, isn't it ?"

"You are a devil, Jyoti," Chandru said laughing. "But, really it was so. On the whole, it was a terrible state of affairs."

"But," Chandru added, "let me say this. So far as my mission was concerned, it was a success. You can't imagine, Jyoti, what a fantastic lot of material they have in their party library there. From many countries from Latin America to the Dutch East Indies and Japan, dedicated scholars had secured an enormous amount of data about their economic set-up — details of industrial and trading institutions and the foreign interests involved. I was amazed. There may be only a few Communists in the world, but they are brilliant people judging from the work they have done. I cannot think of any single library in the world where such a vast collection of economic data is available."

"I had for friends Anil and Smieronov — Anil Sarkar is our President's nephew and his big link with Moscow, and Ivan, that is Smieronov, is a young Russian who was first guide to Anil and is now his big pal. They met me when I reached there and from then on, they were a great help. With them to back me and my Russian — thank you for that, Jyoti, and thanks to that wonderful Dhame — my credentials were soon established.

"Within there days of my arrival in Moscow, I was at my job from morning to dusk in that huge library. I got more than what I had hoped for. I planned to stay in Moscow for three months but stayed there actually for five months and twenty days. But I couldn't have stood more of it — the food, the hotel, the awful atmosphere of fear and tension and the newspapers full of stories of threats from "imperialists and fascists".

"Nevertheless, I did not expect that I would leave Moscow precipitately, which is what I had to do. I had

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nearly finished my work when some security officials wanted me for questioning and this went on for three days. They asked me mainly two questions. You can't imagine how they keep their dossiers — they have one, I suppose, for every human being in the world! They had everything on me judging from their questions, but still, for five hours each day, I sat before them for a fearful cross-examination. There were four of them and their first question was why I was not a member of the C.P.I. I told them that I was involved in the student movement and it was my view, which I had communicated to the leaders in India, that, if we wanted to bring the students into any kind of a mass movement, they had to be kept out of politics. How could I do this if I belonged to the C.P.I. ?

"Probably they thought I was being clever. I noticed that and added that, if either the leaders in India or the authorities concerned in Moscow had any doubt on this, I would not be there in Moscow.

"Their leader then smiled and asked why I was so much against the Soviet Union, why I was opposing the link between the C.P.I. and the U.S.S.R. I told him that it was just nonsense to suggest that I was opposing this or that in the Party. I was too young and too new to politics of any kind. It was true that, while I denounced British imperialism, I did not support Russia.

"Can't you see the reason ?' I asked them. 'Would you like the U.S.S.R. to be called a new colonial power ? If, on the one hand, we attack Britain and, on the other, support Russia, our people will think that we are working for a new colonial power. From the frying pan into the fire, that is what people will say. I think you should give us credit for some judgement instead of suspecting us !"

"Jyoti' you will not believe. That man there — he was some political Commissar, I suppose — stared at me

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(and chill crept up my spine) and then said slowly : 'Anyway, your party has faith in you. We don't want to detain you. If you have finished your work here, you can go."

"I was not very nervous because I knew I had gone there with excellent credentials, but this kind of inquisition was new. On the whole, it was an unpleasant experience. In two days, with the help of Anil and Ivan, I packed all those piles of papers in my boxes and left, grateful and what else — sadder and a wiser man!"

Jyoti laughed when Chandru finished his exciting narrative and said "It is true, Chandru, they are very nervous there. To them, Russia is the Fatherland of all Communists. If Russia goes, world Communism goes and so they believe they have to be vigilant all the time."

"In retrospect, Jyoti," Chandru continued, "I have to check all that material carefully. While I was working there, I felt that the data they had — I do not question their accuracy — omitted whatever was not to their advantage. But I, as a researcher, cannot accept some facts and reject others, as they have done. I have to make a balanced study. I hear that the London School of Economics library has a good collection of research material, not the Russian type with a blinker on one eye. I wish I can have access to them."

"Let us see, Chandru," Jyoti said. "We have a party man there, Nakul Chatterjee. I shall have a word with him. If you can meet Prof. Arnold Leslie, I think your problem will be solved. He helps all bright Indians."

"In the meanwhile," she continued, "let us have our ideas clear before we get to work. Unlike you, Chandru, I am involved in the party. Our position substantially is not different, however. I am critical of many things in the party, but I believe in Communism and hope international communism will come to fruition. The points of friction between

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me and the party bosses have not come to ignition point. When we come to that we shall see.

"At the moment, I have a job. This is to analyse reports and draw up points for fresh directives along authoritative party lines. As you know, here in England, in the C.P.G.B., we have to coordinate activity and give directives. For instance, so far as India is concerned, we help with policy lines and our activities are co-ordinated with those of Moscow.

"The basic fact is — whether you like it or not — the Communists all over the world have to put their faith in the fatherland. Communism may have been conceived in Germany and incubated in London but the delivery took place in Moscow. It has been nursed there. In the process, the infant has developed many habits, moods and mannerisms. So much indeed that, it appears, the manners disguise the man. Many have begun to wonder what communism is in fact. Is it what Marx propounded as a concept or what Lenin made into a doctrine and a discipline or what Stalin altered into a programme executed by a soul-less machine. Whatever it is, its home is in the Soviet Union and if the Soviet State is thrown overboard, Communism is thrown overboard.

"And so, we are all loyal to Soviet Russia as they know what is best for them and they tell us how best we can help them. For the moment, I accept the situation along with the rest.

"We have received instructions to help you which is only another way of saying that you should not be allowed to drift away from the party. We were kept informed about your movements and that is why I was able to meet you at the station on your arrival. So, I have to stick to you. In any case, since I know you will never drift away from me, I can vouchsafe your safety to them. You have become

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more important to me, Chandru, than everything else in my life — communism or no communism. Now, let me hear you."

"What can I tell you about myself, Jyoti," Chandru said. "You will laugh if I say that I am in a very unsettled state of mind. I am tied up with moral, emotional, filial, political and professional obligations and in the midst of all this, I believe, I would make myself a good communist or as you said once, a Communist humanist."

"Well, mystery man, keep talking," Jyoti said smiling.

"Well —" he took her hand, kissed her palm and said : "Here goes."

In quiet, even tones he began to narrate how the cross currents of life had made a mockery of his individual desires and decisions. He began with a description of his family, an orthodox Brahmin family sunk deep in their rituals and their routine, for which the sanctity of caste could be sullied by the slenderest departure from the social code. During two hundred years of their rule, the British had allowed such pockets of traditionalism and orthodoxy to thrive undisturbed so long as they did not come in their way. Perhaps, that was because they had some of it in their own society or they had learnt a bitter lesson during the Mutiny in the last century when Britishers were brutally murdered, Hindu orthodoxy having been roused to insane fury by certain British army rules. The rebellion was put down, but the British learnt to leave Indian society alone and even the wide-spread use of the English language and the gentle penetration of English culture had made no difference to these inexorable upholders of conservatism.

He might have been just another brick in this social frame-work but for an astrolger who threw a hammer and the wheel of Chandru's even life broke away from its axle

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and began to roll off the road. He described without omitting any detail the story of Sundari. His description of her, couched now in unemotional terms, made Jyoti wonder whether he still loved her.

"I am not exaggerating, Jyoti, if I tell you that reason has no place when you set your heart on someone. You know that to be true, our meeting and talking here today is proof of it. It is not yet two years since those events took place. But I feel it was long ago. I know now how much I would have missed if I had married her and become a cog in the wheel of that hidebound community. She has now gone out of my life, but the picture of that happy, beautiful face and her deep love — our deep love — will never leave my heart."

Chandru sat still for some time while Jyoti wondered how this brilliant young man whose intellectual reasoning and judgement seemed so radically modern, nursed such obscurantism in his mind. Weak, spineless? She looked at him and the thought disappeared. His bright thoughtful eyes, the virility of his manhood and the utter honesty of his presentation cautioned her not to hasten to any judgement.

Chandru told her that she knew the political part of his story and how here too, he was in a quandary and he was searching his soul. Circumstances had been more favourable to her and, in any case; she did not seem to care.

"I wonder sometimes whether I am suffering because of my ambition. Sundari was an ambition too perhaps. For a young middle-class Brahmin boy, there could be no better prize. And the I.C.S. and what not — was it not ambition? Again now, in the C.P.I., I am being received with open arms and, if only I am willing to play the game, I may find fruitful rewards immediately. But no, I do not want that. I am searching for a new meaning to the party.

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I do not know. Something doesn't click. Perhaps circumstances or events would show me a way."

And then he told her about Nani — confessing for the first time of his being attracted to her physically and his curiosity to see her at close quarters with a mild jealousy of Ganesh who, he had thought at the time, possessed her. Then he spoke of his frustration and the escapade in which Nani had taken the initiative — her illness and her helplessness and finally her sacrific to save his name.

"She surrendered herself so utterly, so completely that unless I was a beast, I could not have deserted her. Every time we met, she so rose in my estimation that I began to feel proud of her. It was not any more a question of protection but partnership. And the child finally seemed to sanctify the relationship."

Jyoti listened with surprise to this curious love story. Chandru had a peculiar talent of vesting his narrative with the force of his honesty. A practical man of the world, on being told of it, would dismiss it as the confessions of a cad, but not if he heard Chandru say it. He made no secret of his desire for this "princess disguised as a waif". "I am proud," he said, "I have made a girl of this servant girl, to quote our great Prof. Patwardhan."

"I am sorry, Jyoti," he paused, "I have forced you to hear this narrative. I wanted you to know the truth. I don't know how happy or how sad my life is going to be with you. But there is a difference in our case. We are not exactly virgins. We know the world and even if there is nothing between us physically, there is enough to draw us to each other, not only intellectually but emotionally as between friends.

"We are in for it any way — call it a life of love or life of sin. We can never run away from each other, for we have been coming to each other ever since we met. I

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knew it all along, that we were on the road without an end. Jyoti, I don't know why. In your presence I feel I am the weaker partner. I suppose I am morally weak."

"Morally, my foot," exclaimed Jyoti. "Chandru, I shall be turning thirty in a few months and I have seen a good bit of the world. No, Chandru, I have no illusions. We have come to stay — Adam and Eve after they ate the apple. Now tell me what are your plans ?"

"Don't laugh, Jyoti," he began. "I have a theory which you may regard as funny. I admire communism as a philosophy and a doctrine, but I want it to have some kind of self-incubation. I shall explain. The gardener goes on digging and clearing at the root of the plants and watering them and the plants grow. Don't they. It is rather like that. We teach the people the evils of the present system and give them a picture of the new world we have in mind. Well, the idea grows and spreads like the eddies on water absorbing more and more people. In a country like ours, the best thing to do is to make people think. Stoicism is deep-rooted with old values. They cannot be brushed away. Wet straw does not burn. Let the breeze blow over it and let in the sun shine and then a simple match will set it ablaze."

"There is certainly a poet hidden in you somewhere, Chandru," Jyoti exclaimed. "How you draw your images!

"Jyoti darling, it seems we cannot talk business for five minutes before you begin to distract me. Now listen. I was telling you about my thoughts. The point is, we should make a multi-point psychological attack on mass ignorance. The Congress has been doing it with Gandhi blazing the trail. What have we done in the C.P.I. ? We have staged strikes, we have killed people, terrorised administrators and scared the rich like rabbits. What is the harvest? A mass of enemies and a mass of angry followers. Do you know what we are going to activise in the end ? We are

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going to create an army of monsters, power-mad politicians and vicious bureaucrats. I dread to think of that. Like Congressmen, the leaders in our C.P.I. are also out to secure power. Once they achieve it, they will try to stick to it, stick to it at any cost."

"What is the alternative?" Jyoti asked. "Are you willing to accept a bourgeois government? We have to have a government, don't we?"

"Yes, we do, but forget the bourgeois government," argued Chandru. "Let us suppose there is a Communist government. What will they do? They will tell the people what to do and when they don't do it, they will use the big stick. The whole cycle of revolt and repression starts again and there will be a new faith — anti-communism like anti-imperialism. What is happening in Russia now? Do you see Marx there or Lenin or Stalin? The masses remain masses and they don't understand what it is all about. The government tells them what is best for them and they accept it. Why? 'We are your government, the people's government', 'Ours is your voice the people's voice'. Who are the people — the leaders. And who are the leaders, they are the people. Marshal Stalin declares it to be so! It all comes to the fact that Stalin is the people. So does Hitler say and Mussolini. Who gives them the strength? A set of robots they have created in the police, the army and a bureaucracy more royalist than the king."

"What, dear Chandru, is your solution? Shut down the government and push out the leaders? You personified them in one man — Stalin, Isn't it? Down Stalin in the Mediterranean?"

"I am not thinking in terms of a solution," Chandru said. "Where millions of people are involved, no one, not even a superman, not even Marx can lay down a rule like 'two and two make four' and solve their problems. My

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theory is : Let the d—n politicians and the bureaucrats alone, but let the people know what they are. In the villages, in the fields, in the schools, in the hearths and homes of people, let them think and talk, ask questions and find their own answers.

"I shall draw a picture for you. Some time before I left Bombay we had a conference of youth. I was afraid, always afraid, of being caught in some irretrievable jam, but Dhame gave me permission under your direction, I believe, under your long-arm operation ! I went and I am glad I went. I met a young fellow there from Andhra, funny man — Venkat, they called him — who could not even talk but he carried with him eyes of fire. He was caught with some terrorists, tortured and jailed. When he came out a wreck, he went to live with the peasant workers because his parents would not accept him. Slowly, he let his blood into them. Our President said that some 30 villages were aflame with his ideas. The result, I promise you, you will see, not now but in some years. They will make up the finest proletarian society Marx ever dreamt of.

"I am no patch on this faceless, formless, nameless hero, but I was on the right track, I think, when I spoke to the students in Madras."

"Yes, I remember," Jyoti said.

"I said that students must look among themselves for their own problems and find their own answers. I wanted an organisation of students for their own field of work and the idea was a new one. I didn't know what our leaders felt. Our President said nothing, but I think he liked the idea.

"So, you see, Jyoti, we have to get a ferment from within. You can't boil a pot of milk with a blow pipe from the top. You have to put the flame below in a broad blaze."

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"Hurrah, my poet" Jyoti clapped.

"Don't joke, Jyoti," Chandru pleaded. "There is no other way. I am a loyal, dedicated communist, but our leaders will laugh when I say this. Yet, this is what is in mind about communism."

"No use, Chandru," Jyoti said quietly. "Don't get into trouble. I do understand you and agree with you, but you have to bide your time."

"That I shall do," he said.

"In the meanwhile ?"she paused.

"In the meanwhile, I shall dig and plough and throw in the manure and do the watering. I mean it this way. You have seen the pamphlet. I have expanded and developed the idea now, in my new book where I shall touch many countries and many industries and show where the labour of millions bear fruit. There is not a word of politics here I hope that translations will come and workers in factories and workshops read and discuss them and draw their own conclusions. And our leaders can make them understand more and more of the truth provided of course they say the right things and not make a call to kill the manager. It is not one or two men who are at the root of all this evil. It is the system — them which is evil and there is only one way to fight it without making the remedy worse than the disease.

"So you see, Jyoti, wonderful women like you and dreamers like me can fight this battle among our own groups and in our little spheres, like how that Venkat has done. It may take years, but then a new order, a new humanism or to call it by its right name, true communism, will be established in the world.

"Dear dreamer," Jyoti said. "You are not talking politics. You are preaching a new religion."

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"Yes, Jyoti," Chandru declared. "If you put it that way, yes, my communism is a religion. But we don't have priests in it. Every man is a God."

"Amen!" Jyoti said. "We have talked enough political philosophy for one day. Now to dinner and to bed."

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CHAPTER 14

Chandru's letters to his parents and Cheenu, although they were delayed even after his reaching London, were full of enthusiasm. He presented a pleasant picture of his stay in Moscow, saying that he got a wealth of material for his book, of which he would soon start sending further parts to his publisher in Calcutta. He disclosed that he would be soon joining the London School of Economics, one of the most famous centres in the world for higher studies.

To Charu, he described his meeting with Prof. Leslie : "Can you imagine, dear Charu, how nice the great man was to me ? When he heard my full story, he was very angry with the Empire Association and said they had made a nasty mess. It was indeed most encouraging to hear him tell me : 'You are lucky, my boy. Your talents would have been lost in the Civil Service.' Can you imagine that, Charu ? Prof. Leslie told me that, since it would not be possible for me straightaway to go in for Ph.D., I might apply for M.A. with a year's exemption (which would be allowed in view of my academic record) and then I could work for my degree as well as the doctorate and, in the meanwhile, complete my book !

"Funny, how chances come to you from all sides, when they do come. He put me to my guide, one Dr. William Lodder, who is a specialist on Russian affairs and, when he went through my work in Moscow, he exclaimed : "My word, you will not be my student but my associate."

"That is the way it goes with me, Charu. But don't expect too many letters since I am going to be really busy."

His letters home brought back a long reply from Charu. The expected letter from his father had not come, but Charu wrote that he was well. Only, he was feeling

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lonely and it was sad to see their parents sitting together for long hours exchanging a few words occasionally. "It is the changes. They cannot stand the changes. You have gone away and Cheenu is also likely to go to Bangalore soon. Of course, they are very worried, especially mother, that I am not married. I am afraid to go near them since mother is always too ready to start the topic.

"You will be glad to know that Cheenu has been taken in the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore where he will work directly under the famous scientist, the Nobel Prize Winner, Sir C. V. Raman, and, Anna, strictly between us, Sundari is fixing Cheenu's marriage with her sister Giri. You remember Giri? She has now grown into a charming girl and will be an excellent match for Cheenu, says Sundari, and I have no doubt about it. Cheenu is also a bit of an iceberg like you and Giri, being as lively as Sundari, will bring some light and laughter into him.

"It will delight you to know the latest. Mali uncle is now swearing against astrologers! It seems he has found Rajaraman's people so snobbish — Sundari is quite cut up about it — that uncle Mali says it was that astrologer who misled him. Also, it is now two years since Sundari was married and there is no evidence of a child yet. Sundari says that, since astrologers are out of it now, Cheenu and Giri are as good as betrothed. But Cheenu keeps saying that he would not get married till you come. Father and mother say he is right."

Chandru was happy and also somewhat depressed to read this letter and lapsed into a melancholy mood and Jyoti left him alone. He had also another problem. He had to inform Nani about Jyoti. Mentally, all the time he was comparing her with Jyoti and assuring himself that what had happened was inevitable. He loved Nani and had deep affection for her. But his feelings towards Jyoti were different. Apart from the physical thrill of her body, they shared an intellectual and spiritual identity.

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Ultimately, he wrote a very affectionate letter to Nani but making no mention of Jyoti. He felt he would have to break the news slowly to her. He mentioned that he was anxious to know about her Cambridge Senior result and would like her to join some college. He was resuming his articles and stories and so, there would be no problem about money.

These letters kept him emotionally tense, but he managed to devote time to his book since he had to keep his promise to his publishers. Out of five parts, he had sent only one to them, even though they had paid him a handsome advance amount. Working steadily with Jyoti's help, he polished up his hurried draft and sent the promised second part to Calcutta. He informed them that, apart from the material he was able to get in Moscow, he was also now working in the London School of Economics and he hoped there would not be any delay hereafter about the book.

The war situation in the meanwhile was deteriorating fast for the allies. Jyoti came up one day and said that their leading party men had gone underground. The Daily worker (to which Chandru had been thinking of writing some articles) was being wound up and then their weekly party meeting they called 'the Round Table' had been suspended. She herself had secured a job as a book-shop sales girl and when Chandru remarked : "What a job for the former President of the Calcutta University Students' Union ;" she smiled and said this gave her an income — "a good income Chandru, since no business is as good as selling pornos which is our shop's speciality. Of course, they go under the name of 'rare books."

"They are restricting travel, Chandru," she added after a while." "I am afraid we are going to be bottled up in England till the war ends one way or the other."

Chandru remained silent while Jyoti leaned back in her chair. "You relax, darling," he said after a few minutes.

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"I shall be back in a jiffy with some supper. He put on his overcoat and hat and went out.

He was very much concerned over what Jyoti said. At the moment they were in heaven, it was true, but he was cut away from everyone, his parents now getting old — he noticed that during his last visit — and Cheenu and his dear Charu. And poor Nani ! What was going to happen to her, he could not imagine. He wished he was a Communist of the conventional type, for then, he would not be wincing over his love for two (should he say 'three') women ? "Affairs of the heart have no place in the communist system."

When he returned, he found Jyoti at the roll-top table writing. "Why this briskness ?" he asked.

"Two minutes," she said raising her left hand without turning back. Chandru put down his purchases on the kitchen table and began tidying up for a sit-down dinner. In a few minutes, Jyoti joined him and gave him the letter she had been writing. Chandru read it with the blood rushing to his face.

My dear Vinay,

I don't know how to thank you for Nani. A real pearl, isn't she ? Can you quote Chandru's arrangement and give her Rs. 200 per month ? Arrange the payment through the College office as from her guardian, Mr. M. S. Ghosh. That should keep her in style in Calcutta. I lived on a tenth of that amount. When you go to Calcutta, tell her about me, you know how. Ever your own — JHU.

Chandru was thrown into a mood of surprise, pleasure and pain. The letter was Jyoti all over — casual, brief, but 'Jhu' : That Dhame on such terms with Jyoti ?

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"What is all this going on, darling, behind my back ?" he asked.

"I had to control myself before telling you, Chandru," she said. "I had Vinay's letter two days ago — he has been Vinay to me, you know, for years. It seems Nani was desperately asking him for your address in Moscow. You had better read his letter. Dhame had written :

Jhu, my love,

I was wondering whether I should write to you or to Chandru regarding Nani. The poor girl has been in great distress though no girl can have more affectionate parents than Mrinal Babu and Gowrima. She was desperately after me for Chandru's address in Moscow, but what could I do? I told her I was helpless, but she wouldn't believe me and I couldn't stand her tears. What a girl : I told her what Moscow meant and she raged in tears. Don't you see, I can't do anything without his consent ? It was a job for me and Gowrima to console her and assure her that Chandru would approve every bit of what we decided.

We had no problem about getting her admitted into Lady Brahourne Women's college in Calcutta. She had done well in her Senior Cambridge and has been taken into the B.A. (Hons.) course in History and Economics. Nani said these were Chandru's subjects also.

We also solved the problem of where she would stay by arguing that she had grown bottled up in one place or another and she must become self-reliant, which was what Chandru would like. That is the magic word for her — 'What Chandru would like'. So, we put her in the College hostel. I paid the fees in Chandru's name, so far as Nani was concerned and, for the purpose of the college, in Mama Ghosh's name. I have told her Chandru left some money with me. Now tell me what I should do. You may tell Chandru suitably. Tell him from me that we should let

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the girl alone till her studies are over. She has written to her mother that she has joined a callege and would go down and meet her during her vacation. My compliments to Chandru — Love — Vinay.

Chandru read the letter unable to believe its contents. So much had happened in six or seven months : What a place was this Moscow : How people got cut off from the world when they went there! He was sorry for the Moscow-wites and the Soviet people. They were right. It was not easy to effect a revolution.

But Nani : He was excited with so many thoughts. Done so well in her Senior Cambridge! And now in a College!

He was happy, very happy with everything that had been done. He longed to see Nani again. He looked at Jyoti and she came to him as if she had read his thoughts.

"You have to make do with me, darling. I love you too," she said.

Chandru hugged her and said : "Thank you, Jyoti dearest. All is well that ends well."

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CHAPTER 15

Chandru was thrilled at the type of students assembled in the famous London School of Economics. They were not many, but he felt they were the cream of the younger intellectuals from all the British territories from Canada to Australia. He could talk only to a few of them, however, and could not spend much time because of his preoccupation with his own work which had to be attended to with the utmost speed and diligence. He had nevertheless an opportunity to participate in a debate once. This was on the situation of India and the colonies in relation to Britain and the war. He supported Britain (to the surprise of his fellow colonials) but uttered the warning that the post-war picture was going to be a revolutionary one.

This debate turned out to be an unforgettable occasion, for, thereafter, Chandru became well-known as a powerful speaker with a lot of idealism and passion. His intervention came almost by accident.

A Malay scholar had put forward a demand that Britain should give independence to India and other colonies to ensure their support to the allies. Chandru asked, rather cynically, which India was he talking about — the India of the handful of nationalist arm-chair politicians waiting for the loaves of office or the thousands of truants and stooges who were solidly with the British including the bureaucrats, or the illiterate, dumb, starving millions who saw in the war some chances for jobs? Britain, fighting back to the wall for her life, must be expected, in all prudence, to run a strong government in India, which she was doing. She was getting the support she needed from every side except what he called the elite politicians. The war against the fascists should be won and would be won, he declared, to the echo of cheers.

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Piqued by a counter-argument by a fellow Asian, the speaker asked: "Would you want to perpetuate British rule in India?"

"Your question will call for a lengthy reply. If you would like to hear me, I can certainly give you the answer," Chandru said.

"Please do come to the platform," the speaker said.

Chandru walked up to the platform with a smile.

"The first question before us," he began, "is, who should win this war — that mad man in Berlin or those free peoples of many countries who are fighting desperately not to be trampled and crushed by him. I hope there are no two opinions about that?

He paused as listeners sat silent.

"As for the perpetuation of British rule in India or any imperialist rule over any subject country, let us take a look at the future. It is not easy to do so in a war fraught with the frightening uncertainties as the present one is. But waging a war like this one can produce strange results. After all the killing and the maiming and the colossal losses on land, sea and in the air, let us take it, we shall win. Indeed, we must, as I said. But please be sure, there will be a price to pay. There will be a reckoning. The trail of victory will be travail and degradation. The gap between the rulers and the ruled will widen. There will be no army to provide employment. On the other hand, there will be trained men, trained in the use of arms, to swell the ranks of the disgruntled. War industries will wind up. There will be no buyers for war goods.

"Three centuries ago, Edmund Burke warned Britain that, with the weakening of the imperial power, the distant outposts would tend to gain independent strength. He was

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speaking with reference to America and we know America gained her independence. The war can thus liberate hidden forces. It is consistent with the inexorable logic of history."

Five minutes, ten, twenty, passed as Chandru spoke and his audience listened.

"And so," he said, "watch the masses, the millions in India and other countries, those millions who are mute today but will gain their voice when the imperial system weakens. And then, it is not only the imperial power which will be called upon to pay the price but all those social and historical crusts which have kept these millions in subjection.

"Let us keep that picture of the colonies in our minds because, in this hall, I hope, when the war ends, some day, we will meet for a stock-taking and then we shall get a glimpse of an angry horizon in the colonies, angry with the flames of a revolution, social and political. It is here that the imperial power has to take a look beyond today. India presents the most glorious or the most inglorious example in history of an alien rule extending to over two centuries. British political philosophers should know that the British have ruled India for that long, not by force but by tactics of peace. Britain can yet give shape and direction to the Indian revolution by similar tactics of peace in the future too. I do think that the future is not without hope. Only, I would tell the imperial powers: Fight to win the war today, but remember, you have to fight equally hard to win the peace."

It had been an unusual debate and there had been many speakers. But the acclamation Chandru received was, it was said, unprecedented. He left the scholars from many countries greatly excited. His passion and his eloquence, springing from his rising consciousness of the inevitable upsurge of the masses, supervened upon the strands of the war theme with which he had begun. But, to his audience,

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all that lingered was the vision of a handsome brown youngster who had made them forget themselves. Several came to shake hands with him and congratulate him as Chandru slowly elbowed his way out and disappeared.

He learnt of the impression he had produced only when Jyoti stepped in some time after he returned to his room, flushed and excited.

"What happened to you, Chandru?" she cried hugging him.

"Why do you ask? I am fine," he said, surprised at the question.

"Chandru, you incredible, incorrigible shocker! Where did you learn to speak that way? You dropped a bomb. Why did you run away? They were looking for you all over the place."

"How do you know what happened? I am coming from Cambridge," Chandru said.

"I know, darling, I know," she said. "I know because I was there. I thought I would drop in at Cambridge and see what you were doing and I thought we would return together. Then I saw you entering the auditorium, but, before I could locate you in the crowd, you had shot your questions and then you were on the platform. Then all attention was on you. My, my, my . . . ! What an oration? What made you say all that?"

"I don't know," Chandru replied, "whether you heard that Malay chap say that, without political freedom; the colonies would not support British war effort. You know, Jyoti, in poverty-stricken countries with a largely illiterate population, war means employment for the poor, profits for the rich, and the future for the devil. I did not want to hurt our Congressmen looking for a quick short-cut to

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ministerships, but I was provoked to say that the colonies were helpless in such a situation against an imperial power. From there, I went on from one point to another. Really, I do not remember much of what I said. Everything came on the spur of the moment."

"Well, you have lost the anonymity you will need for your study here," Jyoti exclaimed laughing. "Deep down in you, Chandru, is a monstrous volcano, but I doubt whether it will ever erupt. There is a big, cold upper layer. But you can spring a surprise, darling."

The episode seemed to be the starting point of a new career for Chandru. Numerous occasions came afterwards when he was called upon to speak and, as weeks passed, it seemed that Chandru's academic mind began to be fired by a new political spirit. Communist party men were embarrassed since, while speaking about the inevitable revolutionary upsurge among the hungry, homeless masses of the world, he raised his voice for an all-out effort for the victory of the allies. These debates were academic, but they had one significance. His political personality began to take shape.

Quite often, Jyoti questioned him and they had endless arguments. Communism, Chandru argued, was not being practised to lead the world to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was leading to a dictatorship like any other dictatorship, call it fascist, nazi or anything else. "What is the difference between Hitler in Germany and Stalin in Russia? Who gives them the strength? It is the police, the army and the bureaucracy. Whether it is Stalin, Hitler or Mussolini, the real power is this permanent elite of our social framework."

"What is your solution, darling?" Jyoti would ask.

"I have now only a theory, Jyoti. When the time comes, perhaps it may take shape. We should forget the politicians

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and the bureaucrats and work among the people — make them think and ask questions. We must develop it as a cult, to serve, not to get power, the best man being chosen, again, to serve, not to rule. Let every man do his best — and so we come to true Marxism."

"You are lost, Chandru," Jyoti commented once. "These people in the C.P.I. will never hand you the flag. To them, the flag means power, to you it means service. There are many who think like you, as I do of course, but no one will talk. You know why? Then, they become non-conformists — revisionists — and Stalin would hand them over to the secret police for prompt disposal."

"No use, Chandru, no use at all," she added quietly. "Men like you don't make any headway. It is a bad world. Don't go this way and become an inconvenience to the party. Communism is also a political theory and those who practise it are politicians. I am inclined to give it all up — particularly, if you feel so strongly about it."

Such discussions, though occasional, left Jyoti with the feeling that Chandru's mind, no doubt influenced by his studies, was becoming preoccupied with all kinds of political ideas. He was making rapid progress with his book, as this was also the subject for his doctoral thesis. But, curiously, the political conclusions he was coming to were not directly linked to the thesis. The theme of his study was the link between imperial power and economic exploitation. The political ideas he was evolving concerned the masses of people who were victimised in the process. How to end the vicious circle of the rich becoming richer and the poor poorer?

As had happened in the past, a development, perhaps the most important in his life, gave another interesting twist to his life at this stage.

Two letters had reached him during the week. One from

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his sister Charu threw him into depression. His mother had had a paralytic attack and his father had become dejected and had gone on leave preparatory to retirement. His mother had asked for Chandru as soon as she became conscious and was told that he had not been informed as he would become anxious. "When Cheenu offered to write to you," Charu wrote, "mother said, 'No, no, don't write to him now. Let him come in his own time. I will be all right.'" Their father and mother, Charu said, found consolation in reading his letters and both of them would tell each other, "We have no right to shut him up."

Charu also gave him two surprising bits of news. One was that Ramu, Sundari's brother, spruce and finical, had taken up a commission in the army. Charu said that he had been unhappy over Sundari's marriage. The second was that Rajaraman was in London and was taking the I.C.S. examination.

As Chandru was putting the letter back in the envelope, he found a separate slip in which she had said: "Somtimes, Anna, we get frightened. You are not here and father looks suddenly aged. As he does not go to office now, he merely sits near mother or in the veranda doing nothing. Sometimes, I get nightmares."

Some compensation to this sad letter came from Nani who repeated all that Dhame had said and then added: "They say I am healthy and my friends praise my looks. I am telling you since you will then know that your Nani is well. I have given my name to the College as I gave for my Cambridge Senior examination — Miss Narayani Sekhar, not the whole truth but no untruth either. I write regularly to Dr. Manuel."

He was very happy to read this letter and passed it on to Jyoti. She got it from him, but didn't read it. "Chandru, I can't bear to read it. After all, I am a woman. But I respect your love for her. We shall leave it at that."

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Jyoti was leaning back on her chair with her eyes closed. Chandru looked at her and knew Jyoti was in a pensive mood. She had been upset by the letter from Nani. How could he tell her that his feelings towards her were different? Nani was sweet, very sweet, and he was full of affection for her. But Jyoti roused him, thrilled him and he could not look at her without desire. This was probably due to his admiration for her and a sense of inaccessibility to her mind, or perhaps his own unconscious response to her passion. He could not define his feelings.

Jyoti opened her eyes, looked at him and smiled.

"You haye been trying to read my mind?" she asked.

Chandru smiled back and said: "There is a bit of a devil in you, Jyoti?"

"Not a bit, a lot, a great lot, Chandru. I know you love Nani — very much. Perhaps, a woman cannot bear that. I feel so too sometimes. But I know, being what I am, that, for me, you have a love which you can never give Nani. There is only one reason. I make you surrender to me.

"I am your friend, companion, lover all rolled into one. We are just the best of friends, but, between a man and a woman, there is no friendship without love. That is what binds us to each other. There will be more of it now."

"How?" he asked.

"Well, Chandru, I shall give you a present next summer," she said.

"Ah, that is far away," he said.

"Yes, far away — nine months," she said with a mild laugh.

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"What do you mean, darling?" he asked.

"Yes, Chandru," she said. "I have started a baby."

"Lord, Jyoti," Chandru got up, excited. "What is this? I thought you wouldn't stand up for that kind of thing."

"That shows how little you know of women," Jyoti said. "Taking me always for a friend, bedmate and what not, you quite forget I am a woman, even though a communist. Shall we celebrate it quietly, darling?"

"Jyoti, I am very happy, but I think I shall have to write to Nani and we should get married."

"To bring out a baby, we need a nurse, darling, not a Registrar; and don't forget we are in England where everything goes."

"You keep your new world ideas to yourself. I want my child to bear my name," Chandru said.

"Your child, eh!" she got up and ruffled his hair.

"We have a long, long wait, Chandru. When I heard you speak in the School, I was so proud of you. So, there now, my dearest, you will have a child."

Chandru found himself in an utter state of confusion. His dominant emotion was a sense of concern about what would happen to Nani.

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CHAPTER 16

Chandru's letter to Nani was one of the saddest he had written in his life. Prompted no doubt by his extraordinary affection for her and absolute faith in her trust in him, he decided to share his thoughts with her, than which, he thought, there was no more honourable course open to him. He described in detail his meeting with Jyoti and the growth of their companionship and love.

As usual, he said, he did not have much choice in the shaping of his life and the bond between him and Jyoti developed with an inevitability from the beginning. Their union, it seemed, only awaited their meeting for they complemented each other in every way. They had the same academic and political background with an almost identical career, their physical attraction was mutual and total, their intellectual and psychological make-up had a challenging mutual allurement and over and above all, they were thrown together in a manner that they could not have kept away from each other.

"*You can understand how, far away from home and thrown to ourselves, we were drawn to each other. I never imagined, nevertheless, that this kind of life would have much significance, but, some days ago, Jyoti told me that she was going to have a baby. I should not have been surprised, but I was, because I had thought Jyoti was a sophisticated woman who would not welcome encumbrances of any kind. Well, Jyoti keeps telling me, 'I am a woman after all.'*

"*Ever since I heard this, Nani, my thoughts have been of you. I know this will give you great pain, but I know also your love is such that, after an initial shock, you will accept the situation, maintaining your affection for me. But this won't do, Nani. We may not much mind — I know you won't — what society thinks. You said that a thousand times before our baby*

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was to be born. But, you, Jyoti and I are not just units of a society to respect or defy its canons. We are ourselves. We have our passions and values. We have to reckon with them. Having given deep thought to your position now, dear Nani, I have come to the conclusion that, in my selfishness, I have no right to hold you to myself. I cannot ask you to forget me. What has been has been and you will always be my young and adorable sweetheart. But now I am estranged — I don't know what else I can say — I want you to have your freedom to find happiness and charter a new life for yourself. In other words, dearest, I would like you to put me aside and, if anyone else can take my place with you, please accept him. I have no right to come between you and a future to which you are entitled. You are very young still and having seen your beauty grow with the liberation from your past, I know the choice of whom you should consider to share your life with will be with you. I shall be less heavy in heart if I know that you have a young man who loves you as I did and still do.

"One thing more. You know how you fought when I wanted to marry you and announce our relationship to my people and everyone else when our child was to be born. I am in the same predicament now. Jyoti will not accept marriage. She does not want to hurt you, I think. I do not like my child to be without a father in the eyes of the world. Maybe, I am 'backward' when I say that — that is what Jyoti says — but I cannot think of it. I am trying to press her by every means possible. I seem to have a knack of getting into situations I want to avoid.

"One thought occurs to me as I close this letter. Since you can have no child of your own, this child will be your child too, as long as you remain single, and even thereafter, for no one can be closer to this boy or girl than you if we are not there. Jyoti knows that as much as I.

Your ever loving
Chandru"

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As Jyoti came when he finshed the letter, he left it on the desk and hoped she would say something.

"You have been writing to Nani, I think, Chandru," she said with her usual good humour. "I know you would be. I don't want to read it, but as I told you, I shall write to her but not now."

Then she busied herself preparing lunch.

"Funny to be pregnant," Jyoti said laughing. "I have not a single woman friend, you know, to consult about the goings-on inside. I want to eat all kinds of things but can't. Shall we go out for dinner to some restaurant?"

Jyoti was looking her best, dressed like one of the beauties of Chowringhee, when Chandru escorted her for an Indian dinner. Despite the depth of the winter and the dim lights to conform to the black-out regulations, the place was crowded and Jyoti was in gay spirits. It seemed as if she was anxious to meet her countrymen and women — there were quite a few of them — though they did not meet anyone they knew. They sat at a table where there were three others and they chatted without formal introductions.

This happy occasion for both of them had an interesting sequel. One of the young Indians suddenly recognised Chandru as the student leader who had addressed a rally at the Marina beach in Madras. He even remembered the name and introduced him to his group of friends.

In the company, Chandru saw a young man, shortish but dressed in fine clothes. Speaking with a guttural voice, he held out his hand to Chandru and said:

"You would be Chandru to me. I am Rajaraman, your cousin Sundari's husband. Not a day passes without my wife talking about her dear cousin. I have been looking forward to meeting you and I have been telling Sundari to

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get me your address. You gave us the slip in Madras and I must say I was a little offended — knowing fully well we were all there!"

Chandru was embarrassed and his face showed it.

"Yes, I must apologise for that. To explain, I shall have to tell you a long story. I was just passing through. Raja, meet my wife, Jyoti, compatriot from Bengal, former President of the Bengal Women Students' Federation. We are fellow-travellers," he quipped.

"You are not Jyoti Ganguly, I mean, before you were married?" Rajaraman exclaimed. "I read your book the other day 'The Vedas and the modern Indian woman'. It was very interesting."

Chandru smiled knowingly, but he was raging in his mind. Jyoti had kept this from him.

"What a day!" Rajaraman said. "It has been such a pleasure meeting you both."

"I am very happy indeed we have been able to meet," Chandru said. "How is Sundari?"

"Oh, fine," he said. "Sundari will be thrilled to hear about our meeting. You had better give me a picture of you and Jyoti to be sent to her. Otherwise, my life will be miserable."

"May I call you Jyoti?" he turned and asked graciously.

"Of course, what else will you call me? Aren't we cousins — by marriage?" Jyoti laughed.

"Sundari will be most happy indeed," he repeated. "But Chandru, she will also be surprised. Nobody in India knows you are married, though many jokes were passed around

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that you would marry a white woman. Who could guess there were people like Jyoti here?" he said in a subtle compliment.

"Well," Chandru said. "How are you occupied?"

"I have been honoured with the crown, Chandru," he said. "I have come into the I.C.S., which you spurned. The results came only last month, We have to be here for another year or so, and then to the districts with the pipe and the polo hat."

Everyone laughed.

They had to separate as the table was crowded and parted promising to meet again. Jyoti told him she would phone before coming.

Coming back home in a very happy mood, Jyoti whispered: "Claiming titles you don't possess, don't you? In too much of a hurry to call yourself husband?"

"Serves you right," he said. "Holding back on that book! I feel like giving you a spanking."

"Why not do it and save the midwife her job?" She took his hand.

"I know, Chandru, I should have told you," she continued. "I was ashamed. Just spoof, believe me I wrote it in an angry mood in one gush after I missed you in Bombay. I might as well have called it 'The elusive bedroom'. Your copy is here, duly autographed."

As soon as they reached home, she went to her wardrobe and, from underneath same clothes, took out a book with a highly decorative cover in gold and red. He opened and read. the note: "To my dearest, admirable Chandru for whom I am waiting—Jyoti, London, July 1939".

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Chandru had a restless sleep that night. Sundari's husband, he felt, would make an excellent I.C.S. officer. He had just that charm, grace, brass self-confidence and arrogance that characterised most of the Civil Servants in India he had heard spoken of and Sundari would have to become a part of his social orchestra. "One takes life as it comes."

The meeting also left a note of alarm. Rajaraman would be writing to Sundari and she would write to Charu. Before the news travelled home this way, he must write himself. The best thing would be to write to Charu. His parents would be shocked but there was no alternative.

There was only one chance to counter the shock and distress to his parents over his marrying "out of caste". That chance would be Jyoti's face. If they saw her picture, they would forgive him.

Her beauty with her magnificent, intelligent eyes and her happy face — that would win them over. That was the only hope.

Jyoti as usual joked about Chandru's idea to send home a photograph and teased him saying: "How can we pose for a photograph like a married couple, Chandru, when we are not married?"

"What can I do, Jyoti?" he said. "I have to convey the news about us to my parents. This cannot be delayed. Rajaraman will write to Sundari and she will relay it to Charu. I am so sick. I don't know what to do. I am very happy, darling, but my poor parents — they will be hurt if I remain silent."

"Let us have a picture taken, Jyoti — please," Chandru pleaded. "You look much happier and much more beautiful now than when you were in India."

"All right, flatterer," she said. "Let us go and then

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we shall have lunch somewhere. You can drop me at my shop."

Jyoti dressed very carefully in a dark amber-coloured saree with a flower pattern and a thin lace border. She combed her hair and made up her face. They went to a studio.

The picture which came in the night surpassed Chandru's hopes. Once she agreed to cooperate, Jyoti was a model and her face in the picture with her beautiful smile and twinkling bright eyes made her appear exactly how Chandru hoped she would. He himself was smiling and happy. Chandru was full of joy and began caressing her until she cried: "You make me feel like a bride, Chandru. Please don't tease me."

Yet, Chandru could see she was pleased and, to his surprise, added after a few minutes: "I shall sign it," and she did so with a flourish.

"You should be in love with me pretty awfully," Chandru laughed.

"I don't like a lover with a hang-dog look," she said. "And now, get me a photograph of Charu, or better still, I think, I shall write to her. Will your parents be upset, Chandru? I am quite nervous."

Actually, Chandru's letter to his father was a brief one in which he informed him that he had met Jyoti at Hyderabad and how they had a similar career. They became friends when they met in London. For the first time, Chandru confessed to his father that he was heart-broken when Sundari's marriage took place and he decided he could not be happy if he married anyone from their own place. In fact, his life itself changed because of his bitter disappointment. He felt he would be happy with Jyoti. She came from a good Bengali Brahmin family and he added:

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"When you see her, you will all agree that I have not made a mistake. I am sure, dear father, you will be proud of her. I hope you will give us your blessings. I am certain mother will fall in love with her. We have become too friendly with each other not to meet often. So we decided to marry, especially as we are unlikely to return to India very soon because of the war. Father, please explain to mother and we send our love and respects to both of you. Your ever affectionate and devoted son, Chandru."

Joyti's letter to Charu was in her typical style, coaxing and taunting, and Chandru felt Charu would love it. Jyoti wrote:

My unseen, yet already dear Charu,

If I had a brother who dotes on his sister as your brother dotes on you, I should be in what they call the Seventh Heaven. And, so, if you find my letter so familiar and unreserved, you should know why. You are not a stranger to me at all. Charu, Charu, how many thousand times I have heard that name — and how dear it has become to me.

Your Anna is shy and so I must take this burden of telling you what happened between us. He was a hopeless country lad when I first saw him in Hyderabad, and, as between women, let me pass the secret on to you — I fell in love with him at first sight, just as they describe in the novels. I did not even know his name. Then, we discovered each other. We began rather similarly, by passing our exams with credit — I did quite as well as he did and became a student leader and was gradually drawn into politics. That is how I came to Hyderabad and met your brother.

By the time he reached London and we met, we were the best of friends. We were collaborating in our work also and then we got to talking and our subject quite often was our 'dear little Charu.'

Well, Charu, I am writing to tell first about us, but, as

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this will be done not in one letter but in a series, I go to my immediate purpose which is to request you to send a photograph of yourself with your autograph which I may keep for myself. To ensure compliance, I am sending a photo which we took as soon as we got engaged. Don't be disappointed if I look a crazy Bengali girl, but I assure you I love your brother and all of you, now that I have heard so much about you all. Please convey my pranams to Appa and Amma and with my love to Cheenu and yourself,

Your unknown but loving sister
Jyoti.

The same day, the letters, with the photograph, were posted, Jyoti got an enlargement of the photo, gave it a beautiful ebony frame and put it up on the wall right in front of the roll-top table. "That is for our little one," she told Chandru.

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CHAPTER 17

It was when England was passing through the most gloomy months after Dunkirk that Jyoti gave birth to her son. The months in between had been eventful. Jyoti had agreed to marry Chandru and they were married so that he was able to sign his name 'Chandrasekhar' proudly as the father of the child in the Birth Register. Chandru's mother had died suddenly after a cerebral attack and he had been inconsolable for many days.

Each of these episodes spilled over several days so that the months of pregnancy seemed to pass quickly for Jyoti. Chandru was taken by surprise when Nani wrote an unusually brief but affectionate letter in reply to his. She said she knew about Jyoti from the Ghoshes and she loved him too much to come in his way. She gave them both her best wishes adding in a postscript: "Can you believe that I will marry anyone else? No, my dearest, noble master, I understand how you feel. But I told you long ago that there would never be anybody else."

Two days later, Chandru noticed Jyoti reading a long letter from Nani. He could make that out easily. He expected that Jyoti would show it to him, but she did not. He was in suspense, but he felt somehow he could not ask her. The next morning Jyoti went out early and came back smiling. "If you still want to marry me," she said, "come on. Let us go. I have fixed up everything."

They dressed happily and got out. Jyoti's condition was fairly noticeable and the Registrar smiled as he put the seal on their marriage certificate.

"How did you like the ceremony?" Jyoti asked gaily.

"Suits us admirably. Snap decision, isn't it?" Chandru

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commented. "Why did you change your mind about the marriage, Jyoti?" he asked after a pause.

"Don't ask me that, Chandru," she replied looking at him, her mood suddenly becoming pensive. "Nani wrote to me. Let us not talk about it, Chandru, please."

Chandru became silent, shocked and deeply moved. What had that girl written to change Jyoti's mind overnight?

"Now that we are married, let us go for a honeymoon, darling," Jyoti said. "I long to go to Scotland. Let us go to Edinburgh and look round." They spent an unforgettable ten days in Scotland where the war had not yet shut up the castles. Jyoti was not physically comfortable, but she was in high spirits.

Both of them were a little worried as, with Jyoti's advancing pregnancy, they had no friends to help. But soon, Jyoti struck up friendship with an elderly couple living in the flat above theirs. Mr. and Mrs. Westmore were extremely nice and declared frankly that they had been eager to know them but had been wondering how to break the ice. Mr. Westmore had been a clerk in the Home Office and was now living on his pension. They had a daughter who lived in the country and was married to a teacher.

Their quiet life was suddenly thrown out of gear when, some weeks later, Chandru had a cable from Cheenu that his mother had expired after an attack of cereberal thrombosis. Ever since he had heard of her paralytic attack, Chandru had a nagging fear about his mother's health. The news shocked him and when Jyoti came, Chandru was lying on his face on the bed and the telegram was on the floor.

She did not say anything, but sat near him, silent. There was no use talking. One had to live through it, that was all. Her own pity for him was all over her face.

Jyoti gradually took his mind off his grief and mentioned

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to him that his father should be having a big problem now. Charu had not finished her college, Cheenu must have gone to Bangalore and there was probably no help at home. Her point was that he had to help his father.

At the end of it all, Chandru gained enough composure to write a letter to his father and Cheenu expressing his grief and how they were victims of circumstances and how helpless they were against such tragedies. He wished he could come away from England, but the war was becoming more and more alarming and ships were being sunk by German u-boats by the dozen and England was in dire danger.

Chandru wrote a special letter to Charu to which Jyoti added a note saying: "I depend on you to be courageous unlike your brother here who nearly collapsed. Your mother would not want you to be crying but working hard to ensure your bright future. Don't add to your father's grief. Be with him like the brave source of strength you really are. I find that my husband is the weakest among you all. From what he says, you are both more capable of bearing up with the grief and helping your father than he. I am terribly grieved to see him all crumpled up. When you feel better write to him."

Later, he had a brief letter from Charu telling him that their father had stood up to the tragedy, though at first he was shocked and was in a state of collapse because everything had happened so suddenly. His mother had a stroke and became immediately unconscious and everything was over in half an hour. Cheenu was there. Charu had a feeling that her mother's end was hastened by her fear that Cheenu would also be going away.

For several days, Chandru kept to the house until at last he turned to his book when a letter from his publisher reminded him of the remaining parts. Chandru also decided to publish his stories in book form, together with his novel.

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He collected them, hoping to take them to a publisher. In between, Jyoti called on Rajaraman and informed him of the calamity and told him that they would have to postpone their get-together till after her delivery.

What surprised Chandru during these slow-moving days was that Jyoti seemed to be keeping up a regular correspondence with Nani. He made her know that he had noticed it, but she was reticent. At last, one day she told him: "You admire Nani for her intelligence. Well, Chandru dearest, you don't know your Nani as much as I do. I will not show you her letters. I am very jealous. She is irresistible. I do not know how she manages it. She makes me feel that there is nothing wrong anywhere. Just imagine, she of all people!"

The Germans had started their air raids on London with unprecedented fury. Londoners put on a brave face, but they were breaking under the strain of the terror of mutilation and sudden death. Streets were plastered with broken glass and everywhere there were bomb-craters. Shelters ceased to be crowded. Many families had left for the country. The scream of the sirens was often lost in the whistle of the dive-bombers.

After a brief talk with Jyoti, Chandru signed up as an air raid warden. "Let the party be d—d," he said. "I can't be an animal watching all this without doing my bit." Chandru worked with a dozen others in the area, all mostly old men not covered by the call-up.

They had no income now except the small allowance Chandru got as air raid warden. Jyoti had to give up her job in the book shop and the party allowance had stopped. Chandru's earnings were all in India and these had been earmarked to his parents and Nani. Jyoti had some savings but these were corroded rapidly, both of them having been in a honeymoon mood for quite some time. Chandru toyed with the idea of finding a local publisher for some of his

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books, but soon woke up to the fact that his books with their left-wing slant would not be welcome in the present mood of Britain.

Jyoti was rummaging her brain for some new idea and decided to try her luck with the "The Vedas and Modern Indian Woman" theme for sale in the U.S.A. The British welcomed dollars and she sat and rewrote her book. This was not easy for her in her condition, but she sat at the roll-top desk, writing and editing the projected text for presentation to U.S. readers. With excursions into the social life of women in the west, with traditions sometimes as hidebound as in eastern societies, she found the theme exciting. Till her manuscript was fairly complete, she did not show it to Chandru. He was amazed at the manner in which she had marshalled and presented facts gleaned from various sources to give weight to the publication, and, at the same time, project them with the necessary human-interest details to ensure popular appreciation.

The book came in handy to solve their immediate financial problem. An American publisher made a straight offer of $ 2,000 to be enhanced to $ 2,500 on a second edition. The Americans in their usual way gave a big publicity build-up for the book and the first edition was sold out in a few weeks and, when the U.S. publishers announced a second edition, Jyoti was in the clinic with labour. Reviewers in the U.S. journals were carried away by the references to ancient Hindu texts like the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* which, though Jyoti had handled them as a lay student, meant orientalism which attracted the Americans.

Jyoti could not contain her laughter when she returned to their Berwick Street flat with her baby and saw the press clippings. "Chandru darling," she said, "it seems so easy to fool the world. You know how I began all in a quirk, just to vent my spleen. Look here now, I appear to have become a social philosopher."

Chandru's baby, Jyoti complained, seemed to be a

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rebel from birth. "I was dreaming of a girl with your likeness, Chandru. This fellow seems to have taken after me. I have a woman's face, not a man's."

"I want to call him Jyoti," Chandru said. "Jyoti is really a boy's name. I want 'Jyoti' to grow in the family. His official name will be Jyoti Chandrasekhar, but we shall call him 'Jhoolu'. They called you 'Jhoolu' when you were a child, remember?"

"Yes, darling, we shall call him 'Jhoolu'. I remember the times when many people loved me, a whole crowd of people, yes," she cried lifting the baby in her arms and kissing him: "Jhoolu, my precious husband's precious son."

There was a vicious air raid that night and a bomb fell on the house opposite leaving it a shambles. The terrific noise of the dog-fights in the air and machine-gunning was unbearable even in the basement where Jyoti crouched with the Westmores. Chandru was away and Jyoti quickly plugged Jhoolu's ears with cotton. The child shuddered quite often and Jyoti hoped that nothing serious would happen to him. It was a brief affair. However, Jyoti became greatly concerned.

"Jyoti," Mrs. Westmore said watching the reaction. "This is the end. We must clear out unless we are prepared to die. We cannot stand another one like this. Actually, we have not left only because we did not want to desert you — and the baby."

"I shall tell you what we can do," Mr. Westmore said. "You know our Annette is in Bedford. They have a fairly good house and must be able to spare a room for you. We have our room there always reserved for us, for Annette lives closest to London and we prefer to go there now and then. I have been thinking of moving up there for a few weeks — till this thing dies down.

"Why, Mr. Westmore," Jyoti argued. "This may take

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years. The war has only begun. It can end soon only if Hitler gets Britain and God forbid this happening. No, Mr. Westmore, England will stand and fight as Churchill has said, for years and years. We must be prepared."

"Anyway, we can be coming and going," Mr. Westmore said. "If that becomes necessary, I shall phone to Annette today and, if she can put you up — I know you would not like to be a burden to her — let us say, you stay as paying guests. We can all go down as early as possible. Would you talk to Chandru, my dear? We will also talk to him. I am sure he won't object. It is essential for your safety and the baby's."

Chandru profoundly thanked the Westmores for their help. With considerable difficulty, they procured a cab and Jyoti and Jhoolu drove to Bedford the next morning with the Westmores.

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CHAPTER 18

Nearly a year after Jyoti moved to Bedford and young Jhoolu had begun to prattle, Chandru was badly caught in a raid and a flying sharpnel pierced the nape of his neck and he fell unconscious. He lost a lot of blood and was rushed in an ambulance to the nearest emergency centre and operated upon and blood transfusion was given, but he failed to regain consciousness. For some time, his whereabouts could not be traced and frantic efforts by Jyoti to contact him were of no avail.

Mr. Westmore rushed to London and Jyoti spent a miserable week before he phoned that he had located Chandru in one of the big hospitals and he had regained consciousness. The doctor had expressed the hope that he would now survive. A sharp piece of metal had missed the brain by a hair-breadth and he would need careful watching. As soon as he got back his memory, Chandru had asked whether the people in the house whom he was trying to help were safe. Another ten days passed before he could be moved to Bedford in an ambulance with the warning that the most careful nursing would be essential.

The quiet of Bedford and the company of Jyoti and Jhoolu helped Chandru to make a much speedier recovery than was anticipated. A careful re-examination by doctors after a month brought the verdict that prolonged rest would be needed since he had suffered a dangerous internal injury in the head and he must not strain himself in any manner. A prolonged stay at Bedford thus became inevitable. The wound left a nasty scar at the back of his head and Chandru joked about it as Hitler's award for his war service. He was relieved from A.R.P. work on the ground that this brain injury would not any more enable him to stand noise and strain.

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While the most dreadful war clouds filled the air over Europe, Chandru was thus on an enforced holiday. Jhoolu had become very talkative and Jyoti taught him some Bengali words. He was an image of Jyoti now and Chandru could not take his eyes off him as, when Jhoolu smiled, it was a perfect replica of Jyoti's bewitching smile. Even Jyoti could not help laughing over it.

After Jhoolu had gone to sleep, Chandru and Jyoti would talk about the events at home. There had been hardly any communication from India. Dhame too had been silent. From occasional reports and comments in the press, they got the impression that the C.P.I. was hand in glove with the imperialist government to fight the "People's War" and Congressmen and women were in jail and some were facing terrorist charges. In one letter, Dhame had mentioned that guerilla units (mostly C.P.I. volunteers) were under training to resist the Japanese, should they advance further into India through Assam and Bengal. The idea, Jyoti told Chandru, was that C.P.I. workers were to be "partisans" in this desperate move. This, she said, must be on the pattern of the resistance organisation in Malaya and Burma to fight the Japanese.

"Don't you see, Chandru, what this means?" she asked. "The imperialists themselves are laying the foundation for the revolution to come. Imagine our party men getting training and arms! Why, it is as good as building the machine for a revolution."

"It is a pity," Chandru said. "I can imagine many of our comrades being full of gusto. But terrorists and guerillas do not make good revolutionaries. Our masses do not like terrorists and they would never be accepted. I won't be surprised if our petty bourgeoisie go to support the Japanese, if it comes to that, against the terrorists. I am rather firm on the theory that revolution in a country like ours, with its millions and millions, cannot be engineered except by an able leadership which can touch the imagination of the

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masses. Look at Gandhi. He has nearly done it, but he started romanticising it by making the capitalists play the role of saints. The revolution thus defeated itself."

"You have to make a beginning somewhere, isn't it?" Jyoti argued. "By the time you get your doctrines right, the game would have been lost. Just imagine! Half a million people under arms. What more do you require for a revolution?"

"The Nazis have twenty millions under arms," Chandru said. "The Russians have perhaps more. The result, my dear, is dictatorship, not revolution."

"Remember, the dictatorship of the preletariat," exclaimed Jyoti.

"That is where I am against the wall, Jyoti," Chandru said thoughtfully. "I do not like the term 'dictatorship' — whether of the elite or the proletariat. I am trying to define my 'revolution'."

"I know what you have in mind," Jyoti said smiling. "You have told me a thousand times and I agree with you on that. Perhaps, your ideas may crystallise when you try it on your return to India."

"What do you mean by 'you'?" Chandru queried. "You and Jhoolu will be with me."

"I know you will need me, Chandru," Jyoti said. "You practise quite a few of your orations on me, don't you? Well, let us see."

Chandru's political musings during these idle months were in a way the reflection of the times. With the progressive brightening of the horizon after the U.S. entry into the war, even in Britain, discussions had started on long-term political goals. Not the least among those leading such

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debates was Prof. Leslie himself who had come out with comments from the platform and also in the press that Britain's war aims must include the establishment of a socialist regime. The Communists, however, had lost their appeal and the theme of the new political group was 'revolution by consent'.

On being allowed freedom of movement and an active life, Chandru went to Cambridge where academic courses had been revived and wrote his M.A. examination. He had finished his doctoral thesis and, on Prof. Leslie's advice, slightly modified it to suit the local angle, making it a study of U.K.'s dependence on the colonies and the Empire with a projection of post-war economics. This kept it free of his political slant which was the exploitation of the colonies by the imperial powers, linking it with the possibility of a socio-economic upsurge in the colonies after the war.

"I am very happy, darling [Chandru wrote to Jyoti from Cambridge]. I was able to get some time with Prof. Leslie for an exchange of ideas. He is tremendously interested in India and was asking me questions which helped me to put forward some of my own ideas and know his reaction. You will be eager to know about this. I would also like to keep a record of this talk to help me on my new book and so, I am putting it down in some detail.

"I told him that his theory of 'revolution by consent' was so simple and straightforward that anyone who had any good sense and appreciation of social realities would not question its validity. But could this theory apply to India?

"What do you think?" Prof. Leslie asked.

"The Indian situation," I said, "can be grasped only by someone who has interest in Indian conditions and also some knowledge of them. The predicament of the C.P.I. (you remember we had discussed that) is that they are in

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a ridiculous plight just now because of their somersault on the issue of the People's War. In my view, there is no need for the C.P.I. to be shy of their stand. The Communist movement is international and Moscow is undoubtedly its nerve-centre. It is another matter if the institutions in Moscow do not conform to the concept of Communism as Marx saw it. But Moscow is a symbol and it will be right for Communists everywhere to rally to the defence of Moscow if its existence is threatened by fascist forces. It will be for the Communists in the Soviet Union to decide whether and where they went wrong on the home front.

"So far as India is concerned," I explained, "the relevance of the Soviet Union is limited to its being a starting point for a new concept to save the dignity of the human individual, eradicating imperialism and fascism. A direction has been shown by Marx and I feel it has a great deal of credibility. It is for the present generation to build on it and explore ways and means of investing it with form and substance. It is unnecessary for me to go deeply into what this implies since you yourself have discussed the problem in numerous contexts suggesting that socialism can be established without an armed struggle.

"The doctrine of revolution by consent, I believe, has been suggested in the context of the war which has shaken people all over the world and opened their eyes to the realities of human tyranny and the need for finding a permanent solution to the impulses behind wars. It is essentially a Marxian solution as I see it."

I was watching him and felt that he was curious about the point I was making.

"In your own country," I said, "this doctrine has some meaning. You have had the good fortune of having a stable government and democratic institutions for at least four centuries. You are nevertheless uncertain whether you would have to have big fights and clashes between class and class,

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even if these might not be as they were in Russia. The remedy you put forward is what you called 'revolution by consent'.

"But look at my country with its four hundred millions. The British have planted in India their pattern of democratic institutions or whatever you call it — Westminster type and so on. My own calculation is that the British cannot but quit India after this war unless they are willing to hold India as Hitler held Germany. Perhaps, the British will have even greater handicaps. What happens when the British quit?

"Would you believe it if I assert that Gandhi does not represent the Congress and the Congress does not represent the Indian people, though he does lead them and speak for them? What I say applies equally to Jinnah and the Muslim League. Do the Princes who rule over what they call 'Indian India' represent the Indian people?

"My point is, when the British quit India, these are the people to whom they will hand over power. There are no means of any kind of a popular election, popular in the sense that the masses will act with a measure of awareness. It is easy to establish institutions similar to the Parliamentary system on the British pattern. There will be a Prime Minister and Cabinet in Delhi and the provincial capitals and the Princely States. An imitation of the British elite will take over. At this stage, if not before it, Gandhi must bow out, because the workers and the peasants whom he professes to champion are out of the hierarchy of government. He has been striving, as you want perhaps, but in a different fashion, for a revolution by consent. Different, because he expects the propertied classes to assume the role of trustees of national wealth — forgetting that feudal agricultural lords and industrial tycoons can never be trustees of anything except their own property.

"In this set-up, the C.P.I. will have a virgin soil to

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exploit — a massive body of ignorant, illiterate suffering people. It will not be wrong if they take advantage of the situation to lead them. The C.P.I. has assumed already that role and they have established some effective institutions. From here on, the objective becomes blurred.

"Let us look at the other side of the medal. From the way the C.P.I. leaders are going, they are not aiming at a socio-economic revolution (which they talk about) but at the capture of power and when they get it, the battle ends. We have only to take a look at Stalin. For the moment, everything is fine. The C.P.I. has launched action along several lines. It is nursing terrorist groups to come in handy when they are needed. It has institutions like trade unions for industrial and white collar workers and Kisan Sabhas for peasants and agricultural labour. It has its own students and women's organisations. It has also some kind of alliance with leftist elements in the Congress which is the only political party worth the name in the country. They are trying to capture it, as they call it 'from within' following the dual tactics of attack and alliance — that is, attack on what they call reactionaries and support to those who are termed 'progressive'. Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, is a progressive and Vallabhbhai Patel (and Gandhi himself) reactionaries.

"This is all very good — for the battle. But what is the goal? Here begins my inquiry. The picture is not difficult to foresee. We will witness a strife of formidable dimensions. We have to remember that despite their terrorists, their trade unions and their inner party alliances, they have to wage a war with a strong elite class, a core of capitalist power with plenty of external support. The job will be tougher than in Russia. If the C.P.I. gains power as they hope to, they will try to establish a government in India as they did in Russia — a government of the ever-looked-forward-to dictatorship of the proletariat which Lenin headed or the personal dictatorship of Stalin. The result in any case will be a different type of authoritarians

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but not revolutionaries. What the C.P.I. now hopes for is to bring about a revolution from above, to take 'revolution' to the fields and factories. Imagine a team of Ministers with heavy security guards leading a People's revolution!

"My thesis is that in a country like India, revolution must come from below, from every village — I would emphasise the village and not the factories because nine-tenths of the population, the poorest of the poor, live in the villages, far below the subsistence level. When the C.P.I. starts its work here and not in the sector of political power, the leadership of the revolution will pass on from the politicians to the people. I don't know whether you will call it 'revolution by consent' but it will be a revolution in the true sense of the word. Throughout the length and breadth of the country, the people will emerge with control over the means of production, with property acquiring a new definition. If a revolution of that kind takes place in India, it will have repercussions in the entire world. There will be nothing called political power, no class wars, no national or international wars. We reach the goal of true commuism. You may call it the perfect humanism.

The long presentation of my thesis was followed by a discussion. Prof. Leslie asked me the same question you had asked: "Is there to be no government in the meanwhile? And if there is to be a government of the C.P.I. or any other party, can this revolution came about?"

"I have an answer," I said. "It may be a slow process, but in India, it is a sure process. My authority for hope is Gandhi. We may be on safer ground because of our own approach, because we will not allow ourselves to be lost in obscurantist or crypto-moral values which afflict his technique."

Prof. Leslie's reaction was interesting. "As far as I can guess," he said, "you are projecting the Marxian concept quite beyond his own enunciation and is at the moment

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sustained only by intelligent logic. Let us hope you will be able to shape it into a workable programme."

He then sat still for a few minutes and asked: "Going by what you say, do you mean that you don't want the Communists to be a political party?"

"Not a political party in the ordinary sense," I said. "A political party's normal goal is the assumption of responsibilities of government. I don't want the C.P.I. to be a party in that sense. That may give a new character to the party if such a one exists thereafter."

"Do you envisage any function at all for the party, now or later?" he asked.

I repeated my earlier remark: "You have to keep in mind that my thesis is formulated with reference to conditions in India. The function of the C.P.I., as I envisage it, is that it will coordinate activity, compare notes and help exchange of information among constituents. We shall have our newspapers. In fact, we shall have every feature of a political party except its goal of office and power."

"Why are you against a political party as such?"

"Because, a political party in power loses its perspective. Any political party in office, together with the bureaucracy, has a tendency to crystallise as an elite. That ends the growth of communism. But the party as an organisation is necessary since, in the spreading and propagation of ideas, an enormous work of organisation and coordination is necessary."

"How can you be sure that the government in power will permit your party men to function?"

"Our party men? They don't function in a party as such. In a sense, it is like the Gandhian movement as it

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began and took root in India till it got mixed up with politics, and politicians began to use it for their own purposes. Where does the government come in against a people's movement of that type unless they come in on the side of the propertied classes? No political party, unless organised on authoritatrian lines, can afford to do it when millions of people are engaged in such a movement. Let us call it a silent revolution by which propertied classes are eliminated by the sheer compulsion of circumstances. The law, or what you call the government, has no scope to function. As the movement takes root, the government finds its functions limited. Conversely, why should people not cooperate with a government which does not draw its sword against them? The C.P.I., if it is not after political power, and if, say, it is only a social organisation to educate the people, not through modern mass media like the press or radio but by word of mouth and by example, should not rouse the wrath of any government. As I have said, it is a slow, very slow process. Changes take place gradually but they take place all the time. This kind of thing is possible in India because there is a basic rural framework (they call it panchayats) the like of which I have not heard spoken of in any other part of the world. Gandhi banks on them."

"I have a feeling," Prof. Leslie said, "it is a far cry from Marx. What are the values at stake? I accept Marx to the extent I accept the inevitability of the process of change from a bourgeois democracy to socialism, but I draw a line where this comes in the way of individual liberty. I speak with reference to the people in our countries in the west and not to the new man of the Soviet Union. Where do you stand there?"

"That question will not arise," I told him, "because that is the fundamental point about this new humanism. No one comes in the way of anybody else because there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose, The concept called congenital hostility does not exist any more. It goes with property and alienation. The field is thus free and clear for

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the human being to develop. Who stops the creative artist of one kind and another from developing talents? A writer or singer or painter or a social scientist is a favourite of the community. And the community helps him but he too is a part of the social structure where there is no attraction to property and all that follows. His products such as they are are the property of all and what he gets out of them is his opportunity for self-expression. How is the individual lost in this context? There are no frontiers to this community. There is nothing called the 'new man' of the Soviet Union as you termed it. The human being really comes into his own."

When I told him that I hoped to put these ideas in a book, he smiled and remarked: "You may be violently attacked, but you will be read. Maybe, these thoughts may have a relevance to the new world which will emerge out of this war."

After his exciting stay in Cambridge, Chandru went back to Berwick street hoping to complete his book without any further delay.

He was in the midst of this work when he had a telegram one day from Jyoti asking him to go down. He knew something was wrong as soon as he saw her. She told him that she had bad news and gave Chandru Charu's letter to him which had been addressed to Jyoti at Bedford. It was thus that Chandru heard about his father's death.

Charu had requested Jyoti to break the news to Chandru as, not knowing the conditions in England, what with the fearful events of the war, she did not want to shock him. After she finished her examination, they had decided to shift to Bangalore to stay with Cheenu. She was accompanying her father to Bangalore when he passed away during sleep in the train. Since Cheenu had come to the station to meet them, she was able to bear the grief and survive the tragedy.

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"Tell Anna, dear Jyoti, thinking of it all, it was best it happened this way. Father did not suffer and he could not have borne any longer the separation from Chandru and all that happened since he left. Father did find some happiness in knowing about you and sweet little Jhoolu. He used to read all your letters to me quite often and I think he became proud of you and regarded you as worthy of his Chandru. I can't say how much, how very much, he longed to see you and Jhoolu."

Both Chandru and Jyoti were deeply affected by this grief. Jyoti normally hid her feelings but this time, she seemed shaken and told Chandru that she felt that their last link with India had gone.

When, at last, Chandru wanted to get back to London, Jyoti suggested his staying on and doing his writing work in Bedford itself. It was not difficult for Chandru to be persuaded although he complained that too much domestic felicity would make him pine for machelorhood. With characteristic agility, Jyoti discovered that there was a shack at the back of their neighbour's garden previously used by an architect as his workshop. Since he had now emigrated to Canada, Jyoti procured this cosy little outhouse for Chandru and fitted it up into a beautiful study.

Chandru's books and papers were brought from London and he was settled for some months of quiet work. It was here Chandru wrote his famous book of fiction in which he sought to put forward his political philosophy. It became his masterpiece and brought him fame and money and a new stature as a writer. The theme for this novel was largely drawn from his own experience of politics in India and abroad and was mostly autobiographical, with his wrenching himself away from his rigid social background.

His story in fact was the life of a Communist with a difference and large chunks of conversation were actually made up of his talks with Jyoti. His thesis was partly

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Gandhian and partly Marxian, trying to reconcile the irreconcilables. But this he did by putting forward the theory that socio-political organisations must be kept apart from government and day-to-day administration. He read out portions of what he wrote to Jyoti in his cottage and she sometimes disagreed with him. But Chandru argued that his theory was intended to put power into the hands of the masses and eliminate the elite class of politicians and bureaucrats. How was the excellent ideal of a government which governed the least to be achieved, he asked. This could be done only by making the administrative machinery a simple handmaid of the machinery of self-government and evolved by the people at different levels.

The heavily-loaded political book was lightened by the human story of the hero with his highly emotional character and his devotion to the women he loved. He gave his book the title: "On Wings of Love and Politics".

The absorption in this work was relieved only by periodical visits of his son who would stray into the cottage and refuse to budge till Chandru agreed to take him for a walk or to visit one of his friends.

"I have exhausted all my stories, Chandru," Jyoti would tell him, "and Jhoolu's demands are inexhaustible. So I am telling him our own story. You like it, Jhoolu?"

"Ah, daddy, you are always alone, sitting and writing. I know all about you now. Mummy, shall I tell him about the secrets now?"

"Oh no, Jhoolu, no. They are not daddy's secrets but mine. Don't whisper about these to anyone. Promise, darling," Jyoti would say and they would all laugh.

But for such moments of relaxation, Chandru was working with a frenzy. He completed his book in less than six months and wrote finis on the day the news came of

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the defeat of the German army in Stalingrad in the spring of 1943.

Chandru had no income of his own, but the remittances from the U.S. publishers for Jyoti's book were ample to keep them in moderate comfort.

Chandru wrote to his Indian publishers that the exigencies of the war had made it impossible for him even to communicate with them though his book was now complete and had been made up to date. It would be extremely topical if its publication coincided with the end of the war.

He had now quite a lot of material for publication. He had two novels and his serious book on colonial economics. A London publisher had agreed to publish his war novel serialised by the Bombay journal. He had also accepted the Short Stories. But the paper situation was most difficult and, therefore, he was told that considerable delay was inevitable. The stories were to be published under the pen name "Gangadharan" but his political novel would appear in his own name. This was Jyoti's suggestion to make it some kind of a confession of a non-conforming communist for presentation to the C.P.I.

"You cannot escape from your old comrades, Chandru, when you return to India," she told him. "It is just as well that you share your thoughts with them."

As they talked, Chandru got the suspicion that Jyoti was referring to his political activity without reference to herself and asked her bluntly: "You talk, darling, as if you are leaving all political work to me. You will share my life with me, won't you, Jyoti — as you once said: 'share and share alike'."

"No, Chandru," she said. "Leave me out of it. I have taken a dislike to politics as I have already told you. I have settled down with Jhoolu. I hope I shall make a good mother". After a pause she added: "Chandru, I have heard

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from Nani. She has just got a job in her college, now in the library, but her Principal has told her that she would be made a Lecturer when a vacancy arises. So, Nani too is out of politics. You will have to plough your lonely furrow, Chandru, and I promise, I shall keep Jhoolu miles away from you. I want to make him a scientist."

"As if scientists are out of politics!" Chandru exclaimed. "Look at Nazi Germany. The best scientists are engaged in the most frightful experiments on which that lunatic Hitler has ordered them to work. Don't you see reports that they are making some kind of unmanned bombers or rockets which can be launched from France and Holland?"

"I don't think Hitler has many days left now — unmanned bombers or whatever you call them," Jyoti said. "Promise me, Chandru, you will not drag Jhoolu into politics and you will make him a scientist. I have only one kind thought for politics. It has brought us together."

"You know, Jyoti, between you and me, who holds the reins. Whatever you say goes."

She walked up to him and caressed him saying: "You never change, the most amiable rebel."

Jhoolu came in and blushed when he saw his parents in an embrace and said: "What daddy, they are waiting for both of you for lunch and here you are fun-making. Come, mummy, I am hungry."

Jhoolu was now in his fourth year. With the face of Jyoti, he seemed to inherit his physical form from his father. Chandru released Jyoti and took Jhoolu in his arms and they went for lunch.

There was a very extraordinary incident before Chandru and Jyoti shifted to London after their long stay with the Westmores in Bedford. They had gone to London for a

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day to look up the flat before moving in and when they returned the next evening, the Westmores told them casually that Jhoolu had gone for a walk. Chandru and Jyoti did not attach any significance to it and they went in and put their bags away. When a little later, they heard the wicket gate open, Jyoti came out. Jhoolu was coming with a young woman in an Indian saree and a long coat. As soon as Jhoolu saw Jyoti, he rushed up to her with outstretched arms and cried breathlessly, "Mummy, see who has come."

Jyoti looked up and in a flash realized that it was Charu walking up to her. She put Jhoolu down and embraced her warmly. Chandru could not believe his eyes. Charu rushed to him and broke out into a paroxysm of crying, all her long-suppressed grief bursting uncontrollably.

Charu had an extraordinary story to tell about how she came to England. After their father's death, Sundari and she had decided, with Cheenu's approval, that she should go for law in the Madras university and, reluctant to stay in Sundari's house when she was not there (Sundari was with Rajaraman who had been posted as sub-collector in a place north of Madras) she got a room in the Y.W.C.A. where she was comfortably lodged.

"I found law very interesting, but was restless as I was keen on coming to England to join you both. The most amazing thing happened to me then. There was a B.B.C. broadcaster who had come to Madras and he was collecting impressions of the war from Indian youth. He turned up at the Y. one day and spoke to some of us and he selected me for a special interview. Then, there was also a short debate with some men students. This B.B.C. man was a fairly oldish gentleman by the name of Burton and I tried to woo him for my chance to get here. I put it to him bluntly. He asked me whether I would like to apprentice for a broadcasting job in Delhi. That was my big chance. Sundari was against it, but later agreed and so I moved to Delhi.

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"It was only then I knew that Mr. Burton was a real big boss. His daughter, Pearl, who was with him, became very friendly to me. He posted me under the local man and, for three months, I was doing nothing but listening to broadcasts, reading broadcast copy and so on. The Army Headquarters had a scheme to send some women press people to give a boost to the women's wing in the defence services — the WAACIs and WRENS — and Mr. Burton gave me a chance. I was asked to cut my hair and given a khaki uniform, and the rank of an honorary Lieutenant. I became Lt. Sarada Aiyar. I lived in camps and wrote my scripts imitating the style of the broadcasters and some of them got through. Burton, who had then gone to Cairo, sent me a brief note of encouragement.

"When one of the contingents was shipped to London — the ultimate destination was then a secret and I didn't know — I was assigned to accompany them. This must have been Mr. Burton's kind help. We reached London three days ago. I manoeuvred to meet him at his office and I have now a week for myself. I knew you were all at Bedford and here I am, Anna, not at all lost now with you and Jyoti and Jhoolu. For the first time in four years," she said, tears brimming in her eyes, "I feed I am breathing some fresh air."

"What a story!" Jyoti exclaimed. "Nothing but a million to one chance could have brought you to England and in such a short time. Just imagine, how this million to one chance did come to you!"

Chandru was staring at his sister, all his affection showing in his face. Charu's eyes, usually glowing with fun, were sad and tired. Just twenty-one! Yet, tall and in fine health, looking about 25. A full woman. She was a different girl from the child she was when he left home. She had thick black hair to match her dark, fine eyes and her Grecian nose gave her face not only beauty but a certain majesty.

Charu stayed in Bedford for a week. Practically all the

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time, she was talking, recounting to them in detail all that had happened since Chandru left India and some of her experiences were so emotional that she was quite often overwhelmed and the talk would be interrupted. She was full of admiration for Jyoti, who treated her like a young baby sister, petting and teasing her. Charu, it seemed, brought memories of a past life to Chandru.

It was Jyoti who revealed to Charu the secret chapters of Chandru's life after he lost Sundari — the contact with Dr. Patwardhan, the drift into the communist camp, the story of how I.C.S. was lost and finally how Nani came into his life, how he met Jyoti and so on, until now they had Jhoolu compensating for all the frustrations and the losses of the past.

"Don't make a mstake, dear Charu," Jyoti told her. "Nani has a saga of her own. She deserves to be loved and what Chandru has done to her is about the best thing he has done in his life. She has now passed her M.A. from the Calcutta university and is teaching in the prestigious Lady Brabourne College there."

"Somehow," Charu said smiling at Chandru, "I knew something was off the track, something was incomplete — your evasiveness now and then in your letters to me. You couldn't know that a woman has some tenth sense a man never has. But I could never have, even in my remotest imagination, thought of a Nani. I am not a clairvoyant."

"Jyoti is right, Charu," Chandru said. "She is a remarkable girl. I don't know what is going to happen when we return to India."

On her side, Charu disclosed that she was engaged to Sundari's brother-in-law Dr. Moorthy, whom she had met in Madras. "He is tall like you or a little taller and is a bit of a scoffer like Jyoti. Calling them 'stinking rich', he laughs at the ways of his family. Sundari feels that her husband's

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house would have been intolerable but for him. When Sundari first hesitated about my going to Delhi, he backed me and said that, provided I gave my word to him he would trust me. So, I am in the chain of love, Anna, with the right guy. You approve?"

"He seems too good, Charu," Chandru said, "to have allowed you to globe-trot this way. I am a little surprised."

"He couldn't help it," Charu said. "For a giant like him, I have never seen a more soft and friendly sort. I am sure, Anna, you will like him. He is rather like you — cannot say 'No' both to his enemies and his friends. He hopes to join me here. I am manoeuvring for it with Pearl's help."

The discussion once veered to Jyoti's and Chandru's books and Charu was impatient to see them. Jyoti had a copy of her book and Charu was thrilled to see it. She burst out into a laugh and said: "You communists seem to be doing pretty well for all your serve-the-underdog hocus pocus. All colour and silk, what is this publication? It looks like something from the Buckingham Palace library!"

Chandru's equanimity was disturbed by Charu's visit and departure, as many sad memories lingered for a long time after she left. Jyoti gently chided him over such emotional reactions saying that he would have to be tough to keep Jhoolu tough. "Life is a hard, very hard battle, Chandru. Sometimes I dread to think."

"If only you stop for a minute to think about me, darling," she said to him in the night, "you will know how it feels to be forlorn. Till you came into my life, Chandru, for many years, I had no personal or emotional relationship with anyone. I used to feel lost at times — my brothers and my parents were lifeless images. Vinay was the only shelter I knew. I know, Chandru, you wonder why Vinay is so close to me. I do not want to keep any secret from you, Chandru, and I shall tell you.

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"When I came out of jail I was 22, sick, lean like a skeleton — alone, lost as I told you. Then, it was Vinay who stood by me. He looked after me like a baby-sitter, served me like a nurse, fed me like a mother and gave his company like a friend. At the end of two months when I regained my strength, I was, I felt, in debt to him for life. Then he confessed his love. He could talk and make you laugh till your sides burst, but, on that day, he was tongue-tied. And I gave in. I asked him to take all I could give. He was 42, twenty years older to me, but I did not mind. But poor Vinay failed. Some women erupt and explode, but I didn't. I loved him and told him that I was his any day of his choice. But he never came to me again. He remains to this day my dearest friend (excepting you, darling) with a bond unknown to the world. Poor, dear Vinay — we can never get away from each other though we can never get close too."

"Please keep this, our secret, Chandru, to yourself. Perhaps, it was this experience which kept me away from everyone else and I was clever enough not to get close to anyone. That is, of course, until I met you. Even now, in calmer moments, Chandru, I have a feeling that we should not become too much attached to anything or anyone. Communist philosophy is right that way. The heart is a blood-pumping machine and its purpose ends there. I was wise to it all till I met you and there is Jhoolu now. Funny, the way even the wisest get entangled. But it is better to keep the blood-pumping machine in focus."

Chandru laughed. "You are becoming a philosopher, Jyoti. But nature has not meant us to be philosophers. We shouldn't have come together otherwise. Nor can we be separated without some kind of an emotional surgery which would amputate what is not the bood-pumping machine in the heart."

Jyoti snuggled up to him and that ended all talk of philosophy.

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Chandru and Jyoti, seated on the lawn the next day, were talking of immediate plans in case a call came from their partymen for Chandru to join their election campaign, when the post brought a letter from Nani, addressed to Chandru after a long time. He read it aloud:

Most beloved sir,

This may sound curiously formal, but Jyoti has forbidden me not to be 'slavish' and how else can I address you when I cannot address you as my beloved husband?

Chandru paused and looked at Jyoti when she whispered: "I told you, she has her heart in the right place and knows how to show or hide it."

I cannot also help writing to you because with whom else can I share my thoughts when I am in great grief? Our most beloved Mama Ghosh is no more. Mami wrote to her daughter here last week saying he had some breathing trouble, probably due to wind, and he became all right after a day. It was not wind of course, as we know now. He developed chest pain after a week and passed away in minutes. The doctors could do nothing. No doubt, he was well past seventy, but he was in good health and it was Mami who really seemed to be ill with her asthma which, she had written to me, had caught up with her after 50 years. We have brought her here.

In his Will, Uncle Ghosh has said: 'I leave this flat to Chandru where, as my son, who reached me too late, he will live with his sweet wife when he returns from abroad.' We were amazed to know that his wealth exceeded Rupees four lakhs in cash alone and then there were properties in Calcutta which he has given to his daughters. And he says in his Will, 'Though he does not believe in property, I leave to my beloved adopted son, Chandru, and his sweet young wife, Nani, my bank deposits earmarked separately which will be transferred to their names automatically on my demise, totalling Rs. 60,000. I give them my most affectionate blessing.'

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Chandru remarked: "She has smudged up the whole letter and her handwriting is illegible. Apparently, she paused while writing, for the writing becomes clear again in the next para."

O noble sir, I can't bear it. I long to see you so much. Forgive me, your ever adoring — Nani.

"Jyoti," Chandru said in a low voice. "All this is terribly sad. I don't know what I can write to her."

Chandru passed the letter to her and Jyoti went through it again slowly, folded it and remained silent closing her eyes.

"Write to her, Chandru, and try to console her," Jyoti said. "I can understand how miserable she must be."

But it was Jyoti who replied to that letter sharing their grief with her. Chandru added at the end: "Beloved Nani, my heart is so heavy I do not know what to say. I shall write later. Convey my love to Gowrima and our sisters there. Ever your Chandru."

Before Chandru could write again, another letter, this time a very brief one, came giving the news of the death of Mrs. Mrinal Ghosh in Calcutta. She had survived her husband by exactly 23 days.

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CHAPTER 19

With time hanging heavy and on repeated calls from party men, Chandru decided to join the election campaign against the conservatives. The Communists along with Labour and the Socialists had tried their best to form a Left Front, but the move failed. The Russian ally in the big war had not been able to remove its taint from Communism. After the Left Front idea fell through, British Communists decided to support Labour and press for socialism. Along with his Indian friends, Chandru joined this group, and for weeks on end he was a companion to the campaigners for socialism. Much of his time was spent as a standby speaker, but there were occasions when he had to mount the platform and then, he made the best of it by projecting the theme of 'revolution by consent'. The end of the war, he argued on such occasions, would confront the world with revolutionary clouds. An enlightened electorate should vote for the party which would work for reform by consent and avert this catastrophe rather than a party which would precipitate one.

His youthful and emotional personality secured him a good hearing, and keeping in mind his secret object, he strayed into his favourite theme that the world had no alternative to a philosophy which ennobled mankind by the spread of a new humanism which would eliminate all barriers and conflicts between man and man. The question before them in brief was whether they should vote for war or peace in the years to come.

As the election tempo rose, Chandru's comrades pushed him more and more to the forefront, for he was a fresher who never failed to get a hearing. Even the Conservative press could not suppress a sneaking admiration for the young Indian who had got mixed up with the 'wrong crowd'. Prof. Leslie, who had followed his activities, knew that

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Chandru was trying out his pet ideas and smiled approvingly whenever Chandru ran into him at Cambridge or London. Charu kept herself busy with her crowd, but joined Chandru now and then and was proud to see her brother grow into a political orator. She knew then that when Chandru returned to India, it would be to lead the new revolution he was speaking about.

About this time, Moorthy managed to reach London, Charu having manoeuvred through Pearl to secure Mr. Burton's help for a passage on priority as a doctor. When Chandru came to Bedford after one of his campaign trips, he was surprised to see a laughing Charu apparently idling. Without allowing him to speculate, she told him about Moorthy's arrival. He had already been there for a week and was accommodated in Chandru's study. He had been welcomed with open arms by one of the London hospitals and had started working as a Resident Physician.

Chandru found him to be a tall athletic figure, handsome in a rugged way, without his brother's polished manicured puff. Moorthy had heard about the resemblance between the brother and sister and almost the first remark he made when he saw Chandru was: "See to believe, I must say." He was two years younger to Chandru, but did not look it. He was obviously tremendously in love with Charu, and she was made to blush quite often by his undisguised adoration. "The hard nut that she is, she must be very happy," Chandru concluded.

Knowing that the Westmores were conscious about social proprieties, Chandru and Jyoti decided that Charu and Moorthy must get married without delay, and they were accordingly quietly married at Bedford.

By the spring of 1944, Britain had regained her confidence and the new optimism about final victory was spreading all over England. Chandru and Jyoti decided that it would be difficult for all of them to manage at Bedford

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and, on the eve of Charu's wedding, they had a quiet chat with the Westmores about their shifting back to London. The old couple said that Annette wished her parents to stay on with her, at any rate till the end of the war, and they offered to make their flat in Berwick Street available to Moorthy and Charu.

The mood all over London was one of jubilation with daily reports of Hitler's fast-crumbling war machine. The Normandy landings and the rapid advance of the allied forces, the liberation of France and the news of German Generals betraying each other filled columns in the British press. In Berwick Street, while Chandru was running about over his politics, Jyoti was the ideal mother and wife and the world could not have been brighter for Chandru when the hand of fate struck again, and on a bright day in early September, Chandru's beautiful world suddenly crashed.

Leaving Jhoolu with Charu, Chandru and Jyoti were going in one of the suburban buses to their publisher who had his office on the outskirts, when they felt that the bus was suddenly lifted and thrown to a side with a thunderous sound of crashing glass and metal.

When Chandru opened his eyes, he was in a crowded hospital ward. He was only half-conscious. He had a bandage round his head and his left hand was in plaster. He turned his head with great difficulty when a nurse rushed to him and smiled.

"Good," she said. "We knew you would rally round."

Chandru blinked, mumbling something and the nurse came near and put her hand on his forehead.

"Don't strain yourself," she said. "You have been badly hurt, but the injuries are not serious. You will be all right now."

"My wife, my . . ." he tried to say something.

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"Your wife is all right," the nurse said. "She is in another ward as some surgery was necessary."

Chandru was under sedation for three days. Whenever he became conscious, he wanted to be taken to his wife. His injuries were not serious though he had cuts in the forehead and the left arm had a fracture and was in plaster.

On the fourth day, he was told that his wife was in a critical condition and was in the intensive care ward. She had suffered glass cuts practically all over her body and had a bad cut in one eye. What was the most serious injury of all was the fracture of four ribs in the region of the left lung and the heart. "The necessary surgery has been done and we are hoping for the best," the sister said.

If he were to be taken to her, the doctor had said, he should be warned that he had to be very tough and must keep his poise. When Chandru eventually saw her, he found her heavily bandaged, one going right across her face covering her left eye. Her breathing was heavy and three doctors were in attendance. She had been under morphia, and when Chandru was taken to her room, she was semi-conscious.

When he softly walked in, she gently turned her face to look at him. He went near her and sat on the bed and smiled. She stared at him like a frightened calf.

"You have been badly hurt, darling, but they say it is all right." Saying that he put his hand on her right shoulder, the only part not under bandage.

"Chandru," she called, her voice barely coming out.

"Yes, darling, I am fine," he said.

She tried to say something. Chandru bent own.

"Hold my hand," she said.

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Chandru removed the sheet a little and took her hand from under it. She held his.

"I am frightened," she said and then remained silent.

Chandru tried to turn and talk to the doctor.

"Chandru," she called. "Come near." He bent low.

"Chandru, please don't leave me."

"I won't, darling. How can I when you are ill?"

She whispered again: "He said, 'touch and go'."

"Oh, that was when you were brought in. Now you are under proper care."

"Please don't leave me, Chandru. I am frightened," she tightened her grip. Her eyes looked wild and her breathing became heavy.

One doctor came up and smiled reassuringly.

"I think you should rest now, my dear," he told her. Jyoti held Chandru's hand tightly. "Chandru," she said in whisper, "ask them to bring Jhoolu."

Chandru turned to the doctor and repeated the request.

"Yes," the doctor said. "We can get him here." He turned to a junior doctor and said: "You have the phone number, ring up, will you? She is fine now, the child can come."

"Let me give you an injection," the doctor told Jyoti. "You are exhausted with talking."

She let Chandru move back with another whisper. "Don't go away."

Charu and Moorthy came with Jhoolu an hour later.

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When he saw Chandru, Jhoolu began to cry. "Why are they keeping mummy there? Please take me to her, daddy," he cried with tears in his eyes. "You are also hurt, daddy?"

"Yes, Jhoolu," Chandru said bending down and putting an arm round him. "But not as badly as your mummy. She is very badly hurt. If she moves when she sees you, she will become worse." Chandru hugged him and whispered in his ear: "You will be very quiet and won't cry, darling. Promise."

"Why? I can't help crying, daddy," he said sobbing.

"Then you will hurt mummy. Please don't cry, Jhoolu."

"All right," the child said.

Chandru went and sat near her with Jhoolu on his lap.

"Jhoolu," Jyoti said in a low murmer. "You are a good boy. Kiss me, will you?"

He bent and kissed her. His face was all wet, but he did not cry.

"Put him down," she told Chandru.

He made him stand near the bed and she gently moved her hand and ruffled his hair and pouted her lips in a kiss. "Come near," she told Jhoolu and, as he went near, "Jhoolu, my darling," She paused for a moment and put her hand again on his head: "I shall always be near you, Jhoolu my sweet, with your father," Then she smiled and gently turned her face and shut her eyes.

Chandru led the child out of the room signalling him to be quiet. Charu and Moorthy were standing near the door. Jyoti looked at her and Charu went near her. "Charu, very had, isn't it? I am glad Chandru is safe. Let us hope for the best. Chandru . . ." she became silent.

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The doctor signified that everyone should go now. Chandru had hardly reached his room when a sister came running and took him back. He tiptoed into the room slowly. Jyoti smiled at him as he took his seat as before near her and gripped his hand. She was breathing heavily.

"Come near, nearer, nearer," she whispered and pouted her lips. He kissed her. She was gasping. She stared at him and in a whisper barely audible began to say something. Her grip tightened for an instant and then suddenly loosened.

Chandru turned to the doctor who rushed up and felt her pulse.

"I am sorry," he said and stood still. "We have never seen a braver patient. No one could have borne the pain she has borne. There had to be seventeen stitches. One lung was practically crushed and was pressing on the heart. Nothing could be done. You know, 38 people in that bus died in that rocked burst. Only six survived. Out in the street, I am told some 400 people were killed instantaneously and many houses were blown up.

"If there was some hope for your wife, we would not have allowed any of you in. She started sinking this morning. A very brave woman. D—n that Nazi swine."

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CHAPTER 20

The P. and O. Liner, one of the few which survived the Nazi U-boats, was approaching Suez. Chandru was lounging in an easy chair on the upper deck looking at the receding Mediterranean. Jhoolu was sleeping near him in another, his soft hair gently fluttering in the breeze.

He had been sitting in that position in the afternoon day after day like many other fellow passengers in the crowded boat, mostly Indian compatriots returning home, many like him having been in enforced exile because of the war. Chandru had been listless and they noticed it, but no one spoke to him and he too was reticent. Jhoolu stuck to him, plying him with questions, and now, after lunch, the boy was asleep.

Unlike that of the crowd round him, Chandru's mind was on the past rather than the immediate future. Since that September day, when he watched Jyoti's coffin lowered down the grave in the wartime cemetry near the hospital where she died, he had not been himeslf. The sweetest part of his life had gone. It had gone with Jyoti, the love and the beauty, the passion and the wit, and the will to fight. Charu had cried and cried, for Jyoti had been nothing less than a sister to her. There was hardly any part of Jyoti's body which had remained uncovered by bandage except one eye which was closed and her beautiful lips frozen in a smile and, till the face was covered, he was staring at her. And, finally, he himself spread the cloth over her face after one last final caress and he ground his teeth to check his grief. Jhoolu, panic-stricken, was holding on to him and was too shocked to speak or cry. As they turned away, he gestured to Chandru to bend down and asked in his ear: "Daddy, will mummy never come back?"

"No, darling, she has gone on a long, long journey."

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I promised not to cry, daddy, but I want to cry. I want my mummy, daddy," Jhoolu said and then burst into a harrowing sob. Chandru took him in his arms and held him tight.

"Daddy also wants mummy, don't you see, Jhoolu? But people who die never come back," Chandru said controlling his voice.

"But why did she die, daddy? She knew I would miss her," Jhoolu sobbed with his eyes full of tears.

"Now, darling, so many people are here. We shall talk when we get home. Daddy is also very sad, isn't it, Jhoolu? We will be quiet now, and later, you and I will talk about it."

"Yes, daddy," the child mumbled.

Charu stuck to him holding him by the hand. He did not know for many days that she had first taken leave from her office and then left her job. Moorthy kept busy, but, occasionally, he and Charu took Jhoolu out. The boy, however, did not enjoy these outings and always came back saying: "I want to go with daddy".

Chandru smiled sadly when the picture came back to him now, how, at last, he began to talk to Jhoolu and tell him about the story of his love and marriage, how Jhoolu was born during the war when bombs were falling all over London. He turned and looked at his son sleeping in the chair with his head leaning to one side, just as he had seen Jyoti sometimes go to sleep in the lounge chair in Berwick Street with the book she had been reading on her chest and her hands on them. Poor Jyoti, ever since Jhoolu was born, she was reluctant to be parted from him even for a few moments, as if she knew she must devote the few years she had to him.

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Chandru's thoughts ran to Charu who was miserable at finding her brother inconsolable and sometimes he even brushed her aside brusquely when she tried to distract his attention. While he bathed and fed and played with Jhoolu and told stories and slept by his side, it was Charu who, stoically, without Chandru being aware of it, put away Jyoti's things which might remind Chandru of her. Prompted by Mr. Westmore, she informed the Bank, where Chandru and Jyoti had a joint account, of Jyoti's demise with an official certificate of death, and arranged for a letter, which had been kept sealed there, to be forwarded to Chandru in the event of her death.

When it came, Chandru put it aside, but Charu opened it and when she saw Jyoti's handwriting, she broke into a hysterical outburst. Chandru went near her and saw the opened envelope and the letter in Jyoti's handwriting. He took it up and noticed that it was some kind of a Will and was dated some days after the London raid in which he was injured. He did not read it, but kept staring at it as if he was looking at a photograph. When Charu eventually controlled herself, they read it together:

"*Chandru came home today from the hospital and is sleeping. I hope he will be his normal self again. The doctors have said that his head injury might have been and might still be a serious one. It was then the ghastly truth about this inhuman war came to me and I realized that what happened to him might happen to me or anyone else, even fatally. In that event, I want my beloved husband to know some facts and, therefore, I record them here.*

"*We have discussed our love for each other quite often because there was a third party to our life. I knew he loved Nani as a true Hindu husband loved his wife, but, from the beginning, I did not have any sense of guilt in sharing our love as I felt there was a certain inevitability in our relationship. Both of us, I mean, Chandru and I, with our temperaments, our common interests and our physical attraction for each other and, of*

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course, the companionship into which we were thrown by circumstances, could never have lived apart in London. I never, therefore, gave him an opportunity to struggle with his moral values and I decided to write myself to Nani and put the whole truth to her without any reservation. It was an unusual thing to do between two women in that position and I was uncertain about her reaction. I cannot imagine what reasons prevailed with her — perhaps she thought it would be best to accept the inevitable or she had a sense of inferiority, or gratitude to Chandru — to write to me promptly that she would blame neither me nor Chandru and confessed, to my utter surprise, how their love began and said she had no right to complain. She requested me to keep our correspondence from Chandru as it might hurt him as well as her. She said that, knowing Chandru's noble nature, I should understand that she could not help loving him.

"When I wrote to her about the child, she was even more gracious and insisted that we should marry, particularly since she could not have a child of her own. As months went by, we became very fond of each other. She never referred to Chandru, but when in one letter I wrote about Chandru and myself, how we shared not only our hearts but our minds, she replied sharply that I should remember that she was a woman subject to the emotion and passion of love she bore Chandru and asked whether I would make her one promise for all that I had and she did not have. I was greatly moved by this poignant letter and wrote back that, if it were in my power, I would give her whatever promise she wanted. She said I should not come back with Chandru to India. It was open to me, she said, to stay away with Chandru abroad and she would keep Chandru — 'and you too, dear sister' she wrote — 'in the temple of my heart'. But if we returned to India and lived together there, she could not bear it. 'I don't know what I will do. Please, please do not break my heart,' she pleaded. I wrote and promised that to her.

"That was the only serious exchange we had between us but for one other letter in which, most unexpectedly and contrary to her own injunction to me, she told me how she regarded

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Chandru. (She requested me in a P.S. to that letter not to mention this subject in my reply to her!) 'Though I have lost him,' she wrote, 'his image with its numerous facets fills my heart. I owe him everything. He is my creator as I am everything he made me. O Jyoti, forgive me, my dear sister, I can't protest; I submit, otherwise, how can my love for him be unselfish?'

"I can never forget those words. That letter showed me how Chandru had transformed this girl into some kind of an icon representing devotion in sublime terms. To me, she seemed to be, like Chandru himself, somewhat unreal, unworldly, yet appealing and irresistible. Of course, I could not reply to those sentiments. She had requested me solemnly not to do so.

"When Chandru began talking in terms of our returning to India, I was in a panic. How could I tell him to go when I could not accompany him. It was then those words kept coming back to me: 'I cannot protest; I submit, otherwise, how can my love for him be unselfish?'

"I have decided to keep my promise to her. The end of the war, I hope, will open a way out for me. As a preparatory step, I have put it to him that I am out of politics. So, that will be a point where we cannot meet each other's sentiments. Then, I have said our son will be a scientist. That way, I have attempted to keep our moorings in Britain or the Soviet Union or the United States, for where else can he develop into a scientist? I hope we will not have to go to India. I shall not go back in any case. I have promised that to Nani.

"When this accident happened to Chandru, it occurred to me that the terrors of the war could reach anyone and, in case anything happened to me — we have been so far, and we are, I hope, safe at Bedford and we will be here till the war ends — I want Chandru to go to India and to Nani, the sweet girl who would have been wife to Chandru but for me; and I hope Jhoolu will grow up as my son as well as hers. But if we survive this war, as I expect we shall if we continue in Bedford, I shall wait

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for the end of the war to work out my course of action to keep my promise to Nani.

"But I promise to myself that I shall never, never leave my dearest friend, lover and husband if I can help it. I wish him to know that truth if he has occasion to read this, my Will and Testament, made provisionally on account of the dangers of this sinister war. Ever since our marriage, all our earnings are kept in a common account and all that belongs to me belongs to him including myself and the fruit of our love, our dearest, sweetest, our darling son, Jhoolu.

Signed
Asha Jyoti Chandrasekhar

Witnessed by:
Leopold Ewart Westmore
Margaret Ellen Westmore

"In the event of both of us becoming casualties, I request my beloved sister-in-law, Charu, to bring up our son as her own; and if he too is lost, everything we own will go to her and the Manager of our Bank will kindly execute this Will in favour of Mrs. Sarada Krishnamoorthy whom we call Charu and debit the cost of the legal processes to our account. A separate formal letter to this effect is appended to this document."

The last para was apparently an afterthought. But she took care to sign it as earlier and also got it witnessed by Mr. and Mrs. Westmore.

After reading this letter, pausing frequently to control their emotion, Chandru and Charu remained silent for a long time. Eventually, Chandru said:

"Charu, I think, if Jyoti were to see us today, she would take us to task for our grief. As long as we were together, I have never known her to be unprepared or without an answer for anything that might come up. She was mistress

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of every situation. I would say it was this prescience to be prepared for any eventuality, however remote, which made her write this Will as she calls it. Can you see what it signifies to me today? It gives an answer to all the problems that confront me. What shall I do? She says, politics in India. What shall I do with Jhoolu? Take him to Nani. And what about Nani and, for that too, she said I must join her.

"Charu, I must not insult her. My world can never be the same again. Yet, I should be ashamed as, if she were alive, she would be ashamed to see me in such inaction.

"Let us not talk any more, Charu. Let us clear up the mess in the room. We must prepare Jhoolu for his life in India."

When Jhoolu woke up — he had been dozing in the afternoon — he found Chandru and Charu busy arranging some papers. Charu rushed to him and Chandru joined petting him.

"We had a letter from your mummy, Jhoolu," Chandru said. "She wants us to go to India."

"I can't come, daddy. Mummy is not there and Charu aunty is not there. If you go out for work, who will be with me?"

"Mummy has a sister there, you can be with her," Chandru replied.

"In Calcutta, isn't it? Mummy told me her name was Nani. It is Nani, isn't it, daddy," Jhoolu said hesitantly.

"Yes, darling. I didn't know mummy had told you," Chandru said surprised. "What else did mummy say, son?"

"Oh, she said, Nani is very loving and she is a teacher."

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"Yes, darling, you will see her when we go to India," Chandru said.

That night, they sat up when Moorthy also joined them to work out some plans.

"We will have to put Jhoolu in a school," Chandru said. "Otherwise, he will never get away from her memory. You know, he has never lived away from her and she spent all her time talking to him and playing with him. He has not only lost a mother but a companion. A school is the only solution."

One of the war widows, one Mrs. Egerton, had started a small children's school not far from their flat in Berwick Street and Charu spoke to her and took Jhoolu one day. The kindly Mrs. Egerton charmed Jhoolu in a few minutes and Jhoolu himself found some friends.

A noisy group walking on the deck passed by them and Jhoolu stirred beside him, got out of his chair and climbed on to Chandru's lap and lay with his face on his chest and went to sleep again hugging him.

Chandru had spent the long days of the journey this way sitting on the deck musing on his life in England. What was happening to Charu, he wondered. Before he left, she had told him that she was going to have a baby and when he wondered whether he should stay back, both Moorthy and Charu assured him that she had made sure of Mrs. Westmore's help again and Chandru must on no account delay his departure.

Chandru wondered whether the increasing bitterness of his political speeches had been frightening her. He was bitter of course in his mind, irrationally, crudely bitter. At one stage, he had begun to imagine that the war that killed his wife had its genesis in the enormity of anti-social criminals who wanted power to dominate the world. It

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constituted the very antithesis of the humanism for which he stood, for the emancipation of the human being from a heritage which meant suppression of the best instincts of the many by a few, possessed by the animal impulses of fear and ambition. The fiercer his language became, the more loudly was he cheered and his own party comrades made way for him increasingly, for he was attacking the war-mongers and asserting that only the poor, who had everything to lose, could change the climate of war. British Labour politicians were in doubt whether this young firebrand would help or hinder them.

A few days after the Labour party won the elections and came to power, he met Prof. Leslie when he gave him the complete proof of his book to which he now gave the title: "The Imperial Legacy: Retrospect and Prospect." The Professor promised to write a foreword and told Chandru incidentally that it would be safer for him to watch Indian politics for some time till he chose to pick up a position. "You are at a tremendous advantage," he said, "You are young with a halo round you now, and also, every party would welcome you. Choose your friends wisely, that is all I can say. Take your time."

The Professor also told him that his doctoral thesis had been approved and he would be officially informed in due course. "You can add that as a feather in your cap. A Doctorate from the London School of Economics is not easy to get — and you got it on a thesis opposing the Establishment!"

Chandru was a little surprised at the Foreword Prof. Leslie gave to his book. Chandru's approach had no doubt been new, but the book was not exhaustive and was certainly controversial. But Prof. Leslie recommended it as a text-book for students of economic relations between rich and poor nations.

Chandru dedicated all his books to Jyoti except the

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callection of stories which he dedicated ot Nani 'who made me a story-writer'. All the books got press notices and, as expected, his political novel provoked both appreciation and heated denunciation.

The money part of it was something on which Jyoti had cracked many jokes. Jyoti's own account, after all their expenses, stood at the handsome figure of £1800. His publishers now gave him nearly £4000 for four books with promise of remittances to India in future. Whatever Jhoolu was going to be, he would certainly start with a considerable legacy.

Chandru felt that Jhoolu had woken up. He smiled and fondled him. "Daddy, when will we reach India?" he asked, his face still buried in Chandru's chest.

"In another four days, darling," Chandru replied.

As the sun rose on a hot October day, Chandru had a glimpse of the beautiful Bombay coastline. It was almost exactly six and a half years since he embarked for Naples en route to Moscow. He had waved to Nani, he remembered. She was standing between Mr. and Mrs. Ghosh. She had not waved back to him. He had imagined that she could not locate him in the crowd on the top of the gangway.

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CHAPTER 21

Jhoolu was in great excitement when the giant Liner began moving through the crowd of ships and small vessels into the Bombay harbour. Chandru had a lot of luggage, mostly books and papers. Charu had insisted on his taking Jyoti's things which were quite a lot by themselves. Charu and Chandru had sat together one day and burnt all her correspondence which included many letters from Dhame and a few from Nani. As Chandru knew that Jyoti had a highly emotional private life though she had always tried to hide it, he told Charu that these memories should go with her. Charu agreed with him and they put the carefully tied bundles into the fireplace and saw them burn away.

Jhoolu was clinging to him as they were getting out of the ship, as the entire picture before him was new and strange. He had never seen so many semi-nude people before, though Chandru had told him that India was a poor country and poor people did not have even proper dresses. But this was not necessary, as India was a hot country and Jhoolu did notice that it was very hot. Jhoolu himself was wearing only a jumper and a light pant.

Chandru did not know that watching him from the jetty was a pair of tearful eyes and, as he moved into the crowd, she confronted him. She merely stopped not knowing what to do. Chandru saw her and when he found that she might break down, he placed his right hand on her shoulder in a firm grip of reassurance and moved to one side dragging her. He put his left arm around Jhoolu and lifted him and said:

"Jhoolu, this is the sister your mummy told you about —Nani."

Jhoolu stared at her for a minute and smiled.

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"You are beautiful as mummy said," Jhoolu exclaimed. "Daddy did not tell me you would be here. He said we should go to Calcutta to see you."

"I came here to see you, Jhoolu," Nani said. "I longed so much to see you and your daddy."

Jhoolu was feeling shy and blushed when she stroked his head and told Chandru: "I was watching you both coming down. What a beautiful picture it was with his hair flying in the breeze."

Jhoolu was pleased with Nani. She seemed so familiar and he said: "Mummy has told me so much about you."

Nani suddenly found her tears welling up again and Chandru gently pressed her arm signalling her to control herself.

"You have another friend also here," Nani said. Quietly moving up from one side, Dhame came up and embraced Chandru, unable to speak.

Chandru was worried, for he saw Jhoolu was becoming a little frightened. He quietly covered Dhame from one side and whispered into his ear: "Be careful, Jhoolu may begin to remember all that he has to forget."

"Jhoolu, darling," Chandru turned to him and said. "This is uncle Dhame, you know, mummy used to talk about him. He was a great friend of your mummy and he is so happy to see you."

"You have a bookshop, isn't it, Uncle," Jhoolu said hesitantly. "Mummy has told me. She calls you Vinay."

For a voluble talker, Dhame did not know what to tell Jhoolu.

"What a crowd!" Jhoolu exclaimed.

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Chandru then said they would move off. "Not yet, Chandru," Dhame said. "Some comrades have also come to greet you."

Then he noticed that, not far from Dhame and waiting on one side, was his old leader and President, as he had known him, with several strangers.

"Welcome back, Chandru," he said and greeted him with an embrace. "We could not resist coming, ever since we had news that you were coming back. We are all proud of you, Chandru. We are happy you are back."

"This is a real surprise," Chandru said. "I thought no one knew about our coming — not even the all-knowing Dhame. He seems to have done a lot of spade work," and Chandru looked at Nani and quickly turned back to them.

"How are you, sir?" Chandru addressed the veteran leader who had been so kind to him and who was the man who had sponsored his trip abroad. "I am quite out of touch. The war covered the entire world with its smoke. It will take some years, I think, before we know what the new world is going to be. That is what they say in England."

When they saw the Cooks man coming up with the luggage, the leader said: "We shall postpone the introductions, Chandru. We will keep in touch through Vinay as usual." Chandru thanked them and hoped to meet them all again.

As the taxi started, Dhame moved forward and said: "Everything is set in your flat, Chandru. Except that your old friends are not there, it is the same old house."

Jhoolu sat between them as the car drove Chandru and Nani to their house. They remained silent until Jhoolu broke the silence by asking: "Where do you stay, Nani?"

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"We will all stay together, won't we?" Nani asked putting her arm round him and drawing him to her.

"Yes, darling," Chandru said. "We will all stay together. You miss London, Jhoolu?"

"I miss only mummy, daddy," Jhoolu said briefly.

"I am most sorry, Jhoolu," said Nani. "How I wish she were here now."

"You know, Nani, we have wept and wept," Jhoolu said, as if to console her. "There is no use. Daddy has said, 'We must now learn to live without her'."

As Chandru entered the house, the first thing he noticed was that the old photograph, Dr. Manuel's and Nani's, which had been kept prominently, was missing. In its place, there was an enlarged picture of a smiling Jyoti.

"Daddy, daddy," Jhoolu shouted. "There is a nice picture of mummy here. Nani, Nani, come," and he drew Nani standing behind. "This is my mummy. She smiles just like that. The Westmores, you know, they loved her as much as they loved me. How did the picture come here, daddy?"

"Your mummy sent it to Nani, son," Chandru said.

"Let us check, Jhoolu, if all our luggage has come. Ah, here are you bags, the boxes and the two big trunks."

Chandru then paid off the taxi and sat in one of the chairs and Nani switched on the fan.

Jhoolu looked at it with interest. "We did not have that in London, daddy," Jhoolu exclaimed.

"It is very hot here, Jhoolu and we need it. In England, it was cold. You remember we were all wearing woollen dresses there."

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"I feel very thirsty," Jhoolu said.

Both the elders laughed. "This is the difference, son," Chandru explained. "It is never hot in England. In India, it is so hot you sweat and drink cool water."

"Yes, daddy, you are right," Jhoolu replied. "I remember now, Mummy used to tell me. But she said that about Calcutta, not Bombay. She said she was born in Calcutta. Take me to Calcutta, daddy. I want to see mummy's house."

"Of course, my dear," Chandru said. "We will go to Calcutta, What do you say, Nani?"

"I live in Calcutta, Jhoolu," Nani said. "I came here to see you and daddy."

Nani called Jhoolu to help her prepare some orange juice for all of them and Jhoolu happily responded and went with her to the kitchen. Both of them started talking about various Indian customs and Nani told him how they could get tender coconuts in Calcutta and how coconut juice would be very tasty and people took it during the hot season to quench their thirst. Chandru was very happy Nani was slowly winning his affection. All three of them spent the day arranging various things which had come from London and, in the evening, Jhoolu accompanied Nani to buy some cotton dresses for him.

Before he went out, he told Chandru: "You won't miss me, daddy? I shall be back in a jiffy."

He returned in great excitement in the evening and rushing to Chandru cried out: "Daddy, you know Nani talks the Indian language like mummy. She was telling me stories of Calcutta, just like her. She doesn't look like mummy, but is very nice. Bombay is very nice, daddy. I miss mummy very much."

Then Jhoolu became pensive and silent.

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"Jhoolu," Chandru asked, "Shall we stay here or go to Calcutta?"

"I don't know, daddy," Jhoolu replied. "Mummy's home is in Calcutta, she has told me. I want to go there. I want to see her school. I want to see her friends. She has told me about Chowringhee and the Victoria Memorial and the Howrah bridge. O, daddy, mummy loved Calcutta. How I wish she were here now!"

"We shall go to Calcutta then," Chandru said. "When we go there, we shall decide about your school and all that. You can also see Nani's college. She is also a teacher, you know."

"O how wonderful," Jhoolu said. "So you can teach me also, as mummy did. She would say I must read big books like Daddy. She said you were always reading books, so you were called a bookworm, isn't it so, daddy? She has told me and was laughing about it."

"Yes, darling, your Charu aunty would call me that. And I have also a cousin who is also very sweet like your mummy and Nani and who would also call me a bookworm and laugh. I am sure she would like to see you very much."

"What is her name, daddy, and where is she now?" Jhoolu asked.

"I don't know where she is now, Jhoolu," Chandru said. "Her name is Sundari and her home is in Madras. She is my cousin, and, some day, we will see her. I am sure you will like her. She is very sweet but she is unlike mummy. She has long hair like Nani, but, unlike Nani, she wears a lot of jewels and is rich."

"I think I remember," Jhoolu said enthusiastically. "Mummy once told me that there was a beautiful rich girl you wanted to marry. You loved her very much, is it not, daddy?"

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"Jhoolu," Chandru commented smiling. "It seems there is nothing your mummy has not told you. You were the best of friends, weren't you? Yes, what Jyoti said is correct, Jhoolu, but don't tell that to anyone, darling. People won't like it, you understand. She is now married to a rich man. Will you remember that, son?"

"Yes, daddy, I shall remember. Does Nani know?"

"Isn't Nani like your mummy, darling," Chandru said. "She knows everything. We have no secrets from her, all right?"

The next morning found Chandru and Nani in a mood of release. The night had been one of intense emotional tension. As Nani came and lay down after Jhoolu had gone to sleep, Chandru turned and drew her to him. Instantly, his memory flashed back to Jyoti. The woman being always the more sensitive partner, Nani sensed it and gently drew back and Chandru released her.

Was Jyoti a bond or a constraint? There was a time when he could not resist Nani. She was more beautiful now, more of a woman. But she was meek and quiet and he had come to know since those early days that love came in the shape of both conquest and surrender. Jyoti represented both. He missed that in Nani.

What was lost from those days when they had been together? He turned and looked. The street lamp threw a strange kind of twilight into their room through the open window and he saw Nani's beautiful eyes in an odd expression of grief and passion. She loved him, but did not know how to show it and was now, after all these years, too sophisticated to be bold and rough. Chandru placed his hand on her head stroking down softly over her eyes and cheeks.

Nani took his hand and kissed it. "She was very kind and affectionate. I bore it, but, my husband — may I call

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you that now again? — I have suffered so much. You can't know," she said and then she held him tightly sobbing. Chandru seemed to find his old dear little girl, in all her passion. The reserve was broken.

They talked then freely and their first concern was how to get Jhoolu to look forward and find a new zest for life. Nani was greatly moved, she said, by the fantastic amount of care Jyoti had bestowed on the child so that Jhoolu appeared to have shared their whole past and present. He was familiar with everything connected with their own and Chandru's private life. She had not told him much only about Nani. Just as well, Chandru said, the child was not prejudiced, for, at that stage, he might not have liked anyone sharing his father's love. Chandru was happy that Nani had not forced herself on him so that Jhoolu was coming closer to her of his own volition. "Let it be that way," he said. "Perhaps, he may start admiring you, Nani, as he admired Jyoti."

"Poor Jyoti, how much a part of my life she was. Friend, lover, husband — those were her words. She was also my political mentor. You must read my novel, Nani. The debates with my love — my second love in the book — were practically actual records of our talks. You can see how we shared our ideas. My politics obviously will stop where our talks brought us to. Her legacy to me here is the wilderness. I have to — I wonder whether I can — find my moorings.

"That is where I am now, Nani. You are now a political philosopher with your university degree and all that — I want you, Nani, to read my novel — the other books are not important — and I want you to join with me where Jyoti left off. What about a new partnership, apart from this — nest?

"How can we be partners? How can we be equals? Jyoti called you by name. How can I, though I do it all the time in my heart."

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"It is good you referred to that, Nani. I must tell you in all seriousness, you will lose Jhoolu, if you treat yourself this way. He hangs on to me and if you want him to get close to you, you have to be my equal, like Jyoti, his mother. Otherwise, he would shrink from you. The freedom he will take with you will be measured by the freedom you take with me. I can understand your delicacy — memories and so on — but he can't. You are supposed to be Jyoti's sister, not my housekeeper or his governess. You have to be his mother. Otherwise, he cannot love you."

"I shall try," Nani said meekly. "I was going to tell you, I am no good at this job. I have not perhaps grown out of my social circumstances, and my desire has been largely to do the right thing by you. Please don't draw me into roles I cannot fill. You have given me Jhoolu. I shall stick to him and make my universe with him and you."

"Nani, you don't understand," Chandru argued pleading. "If I get around, you can't go into your cage."

"Please, please, my beloved master," Nani paused.

"How many times can I tell you, Nani, not to call me Master? You want to lose Jhoolu?" Chandru said impatiently.

"No, Chandru," she said and feeling awfully shy covered her face with both her hands, shaking her head from side to side.

"There, that is good, you have to grow, Nani. You will. I am very proud of you, darling."

That was how they went to sleep that night.

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CHAPTER 22

Once they took the decision to move to Calcutta with Jhoolu, Chandru felt that he should inform Dhame and also have a general talk with him. Even since his return, Chandru felt, Dhame was showing him a new face as it were — one of deep affection as if they had been brought together by a common bond, the love of Jyoti whom, Chandru knew now, Dhame adored. But they avoided the subject though it filled their hearts. Chandru told him that he was feeling lost and gave him an idea of the political crisis in which he was caught.

"I know," Dhame said. "I have read your book and have been in two minds whether I should describe it to my customers as a book of romance or a book of politics. It is d—n good anyway."

In a rambling sort of way, Dhame told Chandru that the political climate so far as the party in India was concerned was in for a big change. It was at its lowest ebb. His patron, who had been of so much help to him, was being denounced as a 'moderate' and his position was in danger from a group which felt that the time had come for an 'uprising'. He advised Chandru to watch his steps though his political campaigning in England had earned him tremendous prestige in the party and the C.P.G.B. had advised the local bosses to utilise Chandru's flair for effective public appearances. "You may have a chat with your old friend though he is now not very influential."

Dhame said that Chandru should not be surprised that, after reading the ideas in his book, the Congress Party opened its doors to him. He could not of course respond to them, Dhame admitted, as Chandru had already a popular political image with his new approach to Communism. In the C.P.I. itself, opinion was sharply divided about his book

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and he warned Chandru that pressure would be put on him to make himself known as a member of the party or not talk any more about Communism.

Chandru laughed and said that, if the C.P.G.B. had him on the platform flying the hammer and sickle flag, without any commitment from his side, it would be ridiculous for his comrades in India to expect him to plunge into their campaign for a suicidal leap in the dark. They would be ruining some of the good work that had been done by some party men if they did not take into account the popular concern for peace and order. There was no doubt that the British were preparing to quit, but it would be ridiculous to imagine that they would do so leaving their investments totalling millions in a country threatened with chaos. "I shall have a talk with our leader as you have suggested," he told Dhame.

Dhame said that he very much longed to come and see the child, but "I can't bear it, Chandru. The boy is an image of Jyoti. I was her best friend, and probably the only one, till she met you. Our relations were a total secret. I have been lately depressed and have been thinking of handing over the shop to the party, but since you and Jhoolu came, I have been in two minds. I have to stand by you and I want to assure myself Jhoolu is well provided for."

"For true communists, we seem to be truants trying to save our property," Chandru laughed.

Dhame said: "Have you given a thought as to who will look after Jhoolu — the State, the Plenum or the Central Committee? How ridiculous!"

"I am not worried about that," Chandru said. "Nani is working and I hope I shall be earning something too — if the books are selling as well as you say. Jyoti has wanted him to be a scientist. Twenty years is a long time to plan

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for, Vinay. Who can tell what the world will be in twenty years? If my dream comes true, we will be quite a few from end to end in the country engaged in building a new social structure. But as yet, Chandru has only one follower — Chandru himself! Jyoti used to laugh at me and I have sometimes wondered whether she gave up politics only because she found me *incorrigible* which was one of her favourite words for me. I am certainly facing very inclement weather for my politics."

"No one would like to hurt you, Chandru. Otherwise, I myself would have called you a d—n fool to preach to people who believe, unlike you, that Communism is government of the many by a few. I read your book and was touched by your all too noble ideas. But, Chandru, they don't work."

"You make me depressed," Chandru said.

"I am not a woman fawning over you, dear fellow. Your first job is to save your skin." Dhame lowered his voice. "You will pay with your life, brother, if you ridicule our friends. That is the way the wind blows. I didn't want to tell you straightaway."

Chandru remained silent.

"It is not what it was seven years ago," Dhame continued. "You were then allowed to have your fling at the politicians. Our President is a staunch supporter of Moscow but he has an eye on the Indian terrain as well. Now, we have a set of fellows who want action. 'Action', they say, 'action to build up morale.' Whose morale? I think you have said somewhere in your book: 'A revolution does not mean a few terrorists. It means an upheaval.' You know how hard it was even in Russia. But for an inept government, Lenin and Co. would have been caught and shot. It is not so here. The British are a tough lot and, if at all they go, as everybody seems to expect, they will hand

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over the guns and lathis into the right hands. That goes for your terrorists and, as for the masses, Gandhi has built up an army of pious-looking white caps whose humility and craze to 'serve the people' must be seen to be believed. But the masses are singing in chorus with him."

"That is precisely what I want to tell them — to re-think a bit. What is wrong then?" asked Chandru.

"Yes, tell them and see," Dhame said sharply in an undertone. "Some people saw Stalin smile and nod, and told him the truth. And they had to pull their tongues out themselves. They never spoke again. And, nobody else spoke again — ever. We are not there yet, but here too, the song is 'not to question why'."

"Deep well that you are, Vinay," Chandru said. "With all that in your mind, you sit here with 'business as usual'."

"But you are not in my happy position," Dhame said. "I am a post office. I have no stakes because I don't exist. I am — what did that Englishman say? — a boneless wonder."

"I am afraid I have to face the music, Vinay. I must. I must play my cards for what they are worth. Let me see what I can do." Saying that, Chandru rose. "Ah, Vinay, I nearly forgot what I came to talk to you about. Jhoolu has decided to go to Calcutta. He wants to re-live his mother's life — study where she studied and live as she lived! And Jyoti has spared no pains, she has told him everything he need know — and d—n well need not know, Vinay, Jhoolu is just five, but it seems as if he lived with his mother for fifty years. She shared her every moment with him. He still lives in her. Nani is becoming slowly, very slowly, acceptable because she is 'very like mummy'."

Hoping to meet Dhame later, Chandru left. He was barely on the street when Dhame came running. "I thought

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f one thing, Chandru," he said. "Have you brought all hat money from England? You told me, remember, about yoti's and your earnings."

"No, I have to get them transferred here," Chandru replied.

"Why not leave it for Jhoolu to decide when he grows up?" Dhame said. "You told me Jyoti wanted him to be a scientist. That money may come in handy if he has to study abroad."

"Right, Vinay," Chandru said. "It is rightfully his and it is for him to decide. In any case, he doesn't need anything here. I shall write to Charu. And what about the flat here when we leave?"

"I shall take care of it," Dhame said. "It is too early to decide that we don't want it."

When Chandru returned, he found Jhoolu in great cheer, bare-bodied but for a half-pant Nani had got him the previous day. "We have done a lot of work, daddy," he shouted, as Chandru entered. "Nani showed me how to do things, you know, just like mummy."

Two days later, Chandru received a letter from his brother Cheenu in Bangalore. He had received the short note Chandru had sent him on his arrival in Bombay and also a detailed letter from Charu in London. He wished Chandru to come to Bangalore with Jhoolu and, if he approved, his marriage with Giri too could take place at that time.

Chandru thought it would be an excellent idea for him to go down with Jhoolu and suggested that Nani might go to Calcutta and fix up a flat — "Why not buy a nice little cottage in a quiet area, Nani, with that money uncle Ghosh has left? He would have loved it, I am sure."

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Nani said that this was too big a job for her. She would wait till he came to Calcutta.

"No, Nani," he pleaded. "You had better do this and keep me out. It is really uncle Ghosh's gift to you and you must know what you need. I am quite confident that you will choose something I would like. Settle for a decent cottage. You can't keep Jhoolu in your hostel, isn't it?"

"You are right, Chandru," she said. (She looked at him significantly when she called him by name as if to say 'you are forcing me to do this.') "It is not allowed. I shall stay with Nandu, you remember, uncle Ghosh's eldest daughter. They can also help me to look for a cottage."

Jhoolu argued in favour of Nani coming with them, but when Chandru explained that she would have to make arrangements in Calcutta for him, he agreed.

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CHAPTER 23

Chandru's trip to the south went off like a sad dream. Nostalgia, regret, pain and tension dogged his mind all the time, but he went through it as a matter of duty to the past as well as the present. Cheenu, his brother, very dear to him, was waiting for him and he longed to see him again. Least demonstrative, Cheenu nevertheless had a heart full of tenderness and love. The memories of the past, the days of his boyhood, the life at home, their little joys accentuated by pleasantries with Charu and the love of their parents — all made his heart heavy. There was then Sundari, whom he was eager to see. And this, it seemed to Chandru, had to be faced, accepting the equation, as uncle Ghosh would say, with its compound of pleasure and pain.

He had also, he told himself, a duty by Jhoolu. He would like Jhoolu to have an idea of his social background. They might not be coming south again. He had patiently explained to the child whenever an opportunity arose, in a manner a child of his age would understand, the story of his family which had its first introduction to him through Charu to whom Jhoolu had become very much attached. With all this in mind, Jhoolu responded to Cheenu's joy at meeting him. All the three of them had a happy time in Bangalore. They went to a number of beautiful places nearby including Mysore, the city of big gardens.

Jhoolu had got over his reserve such as he might have had in a new place and with new people, before they reached Madras for Cheenu's marriage. Chandru was very happy to see Giri, Sundari's sister and Cheenu's bride-to-be, grown into a lovely young woman.

His meeting with Sundari after seven long and eventful years was unforgettably poignant. Cheenu had informed him that Rajaraman had become Acting Collector in Kurnool,

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a place north of Madras, and he and Sundari were coming down to attend the marriage.

He was with Cheenu in an inner room talking to some visitors when Jhoolu rushed in nervously to his side and holding him by the hand, said: "Many people have come, daddy." What happened thereafter was etched in his memory. He came out and saw what to him seemed a dazzling picture. It was Sundari. Their eyes met only for a moment. Then in a gush, she came to Jhoolu saying: "You must be my dream boy Jhoolu."

As Jhoolu stood back in amazement, Chandru prompted him: "This is Sundari, Jhoolu, my cousin. You know, your mummy told you. You remember also what I told you." The last sentence was added looking into the boy's eyes as it were.

"Yes, daddy, I remember," Jhoolu said and he walked up to her. She took him in her arms and embraced and kissed him. Jhoolu looked at her with some curiosity. As she heard Rajaraman coming, Sundari quickly turned: "You have met my cousin, Chandru, in England, haven't you, dear?" she asked. Chandru saw Rajaraman stretching his hand to shake his. Chandru responded and said:

"Of course, we have met. Only, it was all too short a meeting. Hitler kept us very busy afterwards and we could not meet at leisure as we hoped to."

"This is Jhoolu, Chandru's son," she introduced Jhoolu to him. "Jyoti's very face," Rajaraman exclaimed. He caught hold of Jhoolu's palm saying "Sweet Jhoolu." He turned to Chandru and said: "I am sorry I could not come earlier, Chandru. We have a big law and order problem in my district."

Chandru and Sundari did not look at each other, too full of their own thoughts. Sundari went on talking to no one in particular, her voice unable to hide her agitation.

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"Isn't it wonderful we are all here again? Cheenu will make a fine husband for Giri. They are made for each other. After all, they are cousins. And Bangalore is such a nice place."

Cheenu then joined them from an inner room.

"Ah, Cheenu, here we are, as I promised. We have not yet seen father and mother and Giri! How is she? I hope you are having a nice time."

Chandru noticed how Sundari was talking breathlessly, evidently giving herself no time to face him. Chandru intervened gently, speaking to Rajaraman.

"When did you return from London?"

"Oh, we didn't spend the full term, you know. We were packed off quite early and reached Bombay after many perilous days. Once in India, we didn't know very much there was a war on except for fund collections, organising war supplies and so on. And when the 'People's War' began, the Communists also ceased to be a problem. But now, they have begun their work again and it is going to be a hell of a fight."

Chandru then turned to Sundari deliberately to break the ice.

"Ever since we landed, Sundari, Jhoolu has been asking when he could meet you. I am glad, therefore, you are here. Jhoolu, how do you like cousin Sundari?"

"Same as you daddy, very much," Jhoolu replied. Sundari was embarrassed and delighted at the precocious nature of the reply. For the first time, she looked at Chandru full in the face and smiled.

Her face had not changed. There was the same animation, the mood of laughter and the inordinate beauty of

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form, the beautiful laughing eyes, the cheeks with their dimples — Chandru noticed that, physically, she was the same. But when she looked at him, the eyes told the story, a lightning flash-back of all that had happened.

"I had a long letter from Charu," she said, now calmly, unlike a little while earlier when she had spoken with great excitement not knowing what to say.

"Now that you are here, Chandru, I hope we can hear more fully about life in England during the war. My husband's story is all confined to the Civil Service."

"You can't blame me, dear," Rajaraman intervened. "We were there with our schedule worked out for our job here. We were not free-lancing."

Sundari noted the thrust in obvious bad taste, but did not want to make it worse.

"That is the sad part of it," she said. "People in the I.C.S. have always got to remember it. Why, I have to remember it too. That is why their wives have to be accomplished. For me, this is a continuous exercise. This joy of free-lancing is denied to me also. You are sorry for us, Chandru?"

"Don't ask me, Sundari," Chandru said smiling. "I would like to know from Rajaraman whether he congratulates or condoles with me for missing the I.C.S."

"You have plenty of time to think out clever questions, my dear chap," Rajaraman said evading the question. "We are too busy to think."

Sundari intervened, unable to bear this shop talk any longer. She said she had been so eager to see Chandru and Jhoolu that she had come straight to their house before going to see her parents. When she went home, she took

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Jhoolu with her. The boy was so overwhelmed by her affection that he smiled at Chandru and joined her.

The festivities connected with Cheenu's marriage caused considerable distress to Chandru. Uncle Mali, who had felt affronted by the snobbishness of Rajaraman's rich family, had decided to flaunt a bit of his own wealth and he made the marriage what was locally described as a 'resplendent' affair.

Cheenu told him later that he had pleaded with Mali uncle not to squander money and Giri had said she would not get married. But Mali uncle felt that Sundari's in-laws slighted him and he wanted to show he was no inferior to them in wealth and status. Sundari had actually wept telling her father how foolish he was trying to please people not worth pleasing. "Haven't you done enough," she said crying, "by giving me to them — 'the finest ornament of their house'?"

"Why do you cry, Sundari? What is there to weep about?" her father had asked tenderly.

She had looked at him with tears in her eyes and said: "Yes, why cry? I can as well laugh. How sweet is life! 'Yes, my dear — no, my dear — How charming, my dear — Marvellous, my dear — ', and she sobbed: "Everybody be d—d my dear". After a pause again: "What has my life come to? Being what I am, I am content to arrange happy, — no, the word is 'delightful' — lunches and dinners and occasionally preside over women's social clubs or distribute prizes or 'grace the occasion' with my presence when a football tournament begins — a corpse in harness which everybody calls beautiful and charming. O God, God . . ." and she went into hysterical crying.

Chandru was too shocked to hear this. "Charu didn't tell me, Cheenu. Poor Sundari seems bitter."

"How could she tell you, Chandru? Couldn't she know

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how miserable you would feel? And further,, what is the use?"

The day after the marriage, Sundari excused herself when Rajaraman called her to join in a get-together of some of his colleagues, saying that, as they were due to go back to Kurnool, she would like to spend some time with her family. Then she collected Cheenu and Giri and Chandru and Jhoolu and, in one of the big cars her father had engaged for the wedding festivities, they went to the beach. They walked to where they could see the waves coming on, which thrilled Jhoolu. After he had stood in the water holding Sundari's hand, enjoying the pleasure of the foamy waves surging to his knees, they sat down a little way inland.

It was an unforgettable interlude for Chandru. For many months, the memory of this meeting with Sundari after a gap of seven years lingered in his mind. Of course, there had been more silence than speech between them, though, in the course of the conversation, they came to know of each other's inner story as it were. Apparently, Charu had wisely informed Sundari of the secrets of Chandru's life and in an oblique reference to them, Sundari remarked that when a train left the rails, casualties were inevitable. She said that Rajaraman was kind and generous though his office had given him a certain manner and demeanour. "We live in a different world, Chandru, I suppose, it is some kind of a new caste. After reading your book, I feel that our life is farcical"

She fondled Jhoolu with great affection and Chandru felt with intense sorrow how this ebullient, hearty girl seemed to be feeling lonely if not lost. "Can you leave Jhoolu with us now and then, Chandru? He can come during his vacation? He is so sweet and intelligent — and he doesn't feel strange with me. Will you come, Jhoolu?"

Jhoolu looked at Chandru and said: "Of course,

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Sundari aunty. I can come when uncle is also free." Sundari looked at Chandru and smiled: "I shall ask uncle himself to write to you, Jhoolu," she told the boy.

It was she who mentioned about the little present Chandru had given her and she hoped that it would come to her some day. Chandru only smiled and said: "It is safe and it will reach you."

There was only one impression about his visit to the south which left a jarring note. He remembered his train journey from Bombay to Madras for the Students' Conference before he went abroad when he was met at different stations on the route by crowds which raised slogans in his honour. It had greatly embarrassed him as he had been reluctant to be identified with any political group and he had been distressed by these demonstrations.

This time when he reached Madras, the first thing he saw in the Madas newspapers was a report which said that the youth leader, Dr. Chandrasekhar, who had been away in England during the war, was in town. While in England, he had married the famous writer Asha Jyoti Ganguly who was killed in the war. Chandrasekhar himself was an author of several books including the controversial political novel "On Wings of Love and Politics". He was expected to join the C.P.I. and take active part in politics.

This was not the end. A little later, a small crowd of ten or twelve people came to meet him at the house where Cheenu was staying temporarily — the residence fixed for the bridegroom by Uncle Mali. Chandru politely sent word that he could not meet them, but, eventually, met one of the group and explained to him that he was on a private visit. He had been away from India and was out of touch with politics. In any case, he was not in politics now and they could meet conveniently during his next visit The embarrassing interview ended for Chandru, as, at this time, Sundari and Rajaraman with a number of friends came into the house.

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A further incident in the series came when Chandru reached Calcutta with Jhoolu. He was taken aback at the big crowd which had collected on the platform, again shouting slogans. He could not get even a glimpse of Nani whom he expected to meet on arrival at the station. Chandru again politely requested the crowd to disperse as he was tired and ill and it was several minutes before he could come down from his carriage and meet Uncle Ghosh's daughters who had come with Nani.

With the help of her friends, Nani had selected a nice little cottage and she told Chandru that she was only waiting for him to come to finalise the deal. The English owners had already shifted to a hotel prior to their departure from India on retirement. Nani disclosed that the house was furnished and had a lovely garden.

Chandru and Nani with Jhoolu moved into their new house two days later which was bought in Nani's name on Chandru's insistence. Nani paid Rs. 50,000 out of the money left by Uncle Ghosh and Chandru gave a letter to Charu for the payment of the balance of £1000 in Sterling in London.

It was indeed a beautiful cottage with a well-ventilated drawing-room and two bedrooms on the ground floor and a fine big hall and a large bedroom on the first floor with an attached dressing room and bath. Most of their luggage consisted of books, all his huge boxes from London having been sent down to Calcutta from Bombay. It took a week to start their life in a well-ordered home.

On the first night when they went to bed, Nani, Chandru and Jhoolu went to the upstairs bedroom and, after sitting there for some time, Nani was about to go down, when Jhoolu remarked:

"Daddy, why not ask Nani aunty also to sleep here with us, now that mummy is not there. She will be alone there downstairs, won't she?"

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"Just as you say, darling. You know I do love her very much and your mummy also loved her," Chandru said.

"I do like her and love her, daddy," Jhoolu said happily.

"Then, I can marry her and she will be your mummy," Chandru said smiling. "That is, if you like it." Jhoolu immediately jumped to Nani and embraced and kissed her.

Chandru and Nani were married two days later giving a new home to Jhoolu. He was admitted in Jyoti's old school with the name of the parents entered as Dr. V. Chandrasekhar and Mrs. Narayani Chandrasekhar. Jhoolu was very happy with his school and, with his knowledge of English and familiarity with Bengali, he soon got over the feeling of being an alien. He was a robust and intelligent boy and soon won recognition both in the class and in outdoor games. And each night, the fond parents listened to his report on the day's activities.

Chandru's domestic felicity did not last long, however, as, some days later, he got a note from his old President inviting him to attend a party meeting. After Jhoolu had gone to school, when Nani was at home on account of it being her off-day, Chandru had a long talk with her. Nani put it to him gently whether he could not give up politics altogether. He was an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the famous London School of Economics and he should be able to get a good job in the Calcutta University. "And then you can write your books."

"Yes, that is an easy way, Nani, and I can understand why you want me to do this," Chandru said. "But I am restless and feel committed to myself at least to project my ideas, whether I am able to take it to any logical conclusion or not.

"When I was in England, with all my admiration for Prof. Leslie, I was asking a question in my mind all the

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time, why this great man, who meant well and meant so much, could not get out of his safe berth and do a bit of honest work to fight the battle for his ideas? Shouldn't I ask this question to myself in all honesty, darling? In a sense, you and Jhoolu are settled now. I think I should attend this meeting and see where the current takes me."

Chandru could see that Nani was very unhappy, depressed and frightened, but he allayed her fears saying: "Anyway, Nani, let me see which way the land lies."

That was the parting of the ways for Chandru with his family The meeting he attended was a very stormy one and, as Dhame had warned, the old President was now being continuously overruled by a new crowd, angry and boisterous, criticising him for what they called his 'soft line'. Chandru realised that this was hostile ground for him too, for his political attitude was even more positively divergent. His critics took the line that it would be death for the party if it lost its militancy. The war had created a restlessness among the working class people and the peasantry and it would be right and timely now to organise an uprising wherever possible so that the suffering masses would know that here was a party which meant business and they would be able to lay the foundation for revolutionary action against the Congfess.

Chandru could see that this was the new so-called winning voice even though his leader had still the technical majority. Ignoring his critics, the President made the suggestion that, in the ensuing elections, the party must put up a fight but not oppose the Congress wherever leftist elements in the Congress were candidates against other bourgeois parties. Their own party would put up the best possible fight.

The President found that this suggestion worked and was accepted despite the seething discontent of the militants. In the course of his concluding remarks, he mentioned that

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one of their bright comrades who had been abroad, had returned to India at the end of the war and they might like to hear him. That was how Chandru was introduced to this highly tense audience.

One of the militants immediately rose and protested saying that many of them were aware that the President had been trying to rope into the party a number of English-educated young men from Oxford and Cambridge to bamboozle them and they resented this infiltration. "Who is this man, we would like to know? When was he admitted into the Party?"

The President said that he would leave it to Comrade Chandrasekhar himself to answer these questions and he signalled to Chandru to come forward and speak. Chandru decided to take up the challenge, but spoke calmly until he gained a grip over his listeners and then began hitting out. If the idea of the party was the leadership of the masses or strictly, according to the doctrine, the dictatorship of the proletariat, then their work would be to create that spontaneous uprising of the masses and not build up a team of leaders who would tell them what to do. "We don't want a new elite to rise, with instincts not very different from those whom we are trying to replace."

He had spoken on the subject on several occasions and had in fact almost rehearsed his speech this way, so that it was easy for him to present his ideas logically. He pointed out that the Soviet Union was an inspiration, not a model or even an example. They had to strike a new path, somewhere between the Gandhian approach in the direction of a new trusteeship with its accent on the emancipation of the masses (which was the real and vital goal) and the neo-communism exemplified in some countries of the west where the revolution gave supremacy to a few leaders over the people in the name of the latter. This was a grossly unreal basis for the Communist philosophy.

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He appealed for patience and explained that India had a very strong cultural tradition which did not exist in many countries and to fashion a new social order would take a lot of time and patience unless they were willing to take the risk of making their work self-defeating.

"I, therefore, stand," he declared raising his voice, "not for an organisation of leaders but of workers who aim at nothing except the education of the people on the lines of true Marxism. Its simple technique to achieve the goal is to effect progressive decentralisation of authority, create a new kind of anarchy, out of which will emerge a new society. Words like privilege will have no place in this society."

He argued that it was not his purpose to denounce the present working of the party. It existed and would exist, but, simultaneously, there should be a campaign to create that spontaneous revolution he had spoken about. There would be a certain antithesis between the party and those who head this campaign, but no one need be deterred by it because, ultimately, the goal is a healthy synthesis in the achievement of true communism.

"As I had said at the outset, I am not a member of the party and, as I explained, I shall not become a member. I want to be totally free to wage this campaign from which, it is my faith, both the party and the masses will benefit. I leave it to you to decide whether you would welcome a band of men like me or denounce me and others who may think like me. But I warn you, if this party has to build up a strong mass base, a front such as I have put forward is essential and it will be very short-sighted for all those who believe in true communism to reject this platform without giving it serious thought."

After Chandru finished his highly emotional harangue, the President pointed out that, whether the party agreed with the speaker or not, here was a new thesis presented

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to them. As the young Comrade had explained, he sought no favour, no privileges, not even recognition but only a trial. If all those present agreed, he would concede to Comrade Chandrasekhar his freedom to propagate his ideas without committing or contradicting the party in any way. His own personal view was that such a campaign might be worth a trial and the party might give it a tentative and indirect backing, since, eventually, their goal was the same.

There were a number of asides and open comments, some in support and some in scepticism, until the President called out for dissenting voices and none came despite the restiveness among some groups.

Thus ended Chandru's crucial confrontation with a party which was led by firebrands who were committed to the party in conformity with international communism as propounded by the Soviet leadership. As members rose, some of them came to him and complimented him. But there were also some who were openly cynical. The President himself declared that his role as a political campaigner would be on trial.

Quickly, the President walked up to his place and called for order and said that he would like the comrades present to authorise him to form a small committee of three or four members to keep in touch with Comrade Chandrasekhar and his friends so that this campaign, whatever it might be, would be under the supervision of the party. This suggestion was accepted with a good measure of support.

As the assembly was dispersing, the President asked Chandru to stay on and requested two of the strong dissenters to join the Committee and bring two others who held fairly independent views. He was anxious to eliminate any suspicion that he was trying to build up some secret organisation of his own. He felt that this would also help him to make available to Chandru some essential help.

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As most of the members were going to different parts of the country, the Committee met on the very next day when Chandru confessed that he was himself feeling his way and he would take care not to commit the party. Since he hoped eventually for the convergence of the two waves of the movement, the party would stand to benefit from his campaign. It was agreed that he would use the medium of party journals for his propaganda. That night, Chandru told Nani and Jhoolu about his plans to begin his political work. Jhoolu heard about it with excitement and Nani with sorrow and concern.

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CHAPTER 24

At home, after several months, Chandru began to use a study. Nani went to her college and Jhoolu to his school and Chandru attended to his writing work. Articles began to appear in the Party journals under his name projecting different aspects of his ideas. They were sometimes interesting narratives of conditions in rural areas or in factories employing large numbers of workers. Others spoke of an emerging philosophy of the exhilaration of man coming out of inhibitions and social enslavement. He launched virulent attacks, welcomed by party leaders, on landowning and capitalist classes and the evil of property. He presented dramatic pictures of the opportunity for students, women, kisans and harassed workers in factories to organise themselves. The only field he did not enter was the politics of the party and its march to power.

Bit by bit thus, through leftist journals in the country, not merely those run by the Communists, he projected ideas which made a direct appeal to the masses. Though he wrote in English, translations appeared in the regional newspapers. He got an encouraging letter from his leader saying that, so far, his writings had only been helpful to the party, but adding the warning that, in speaking of mass movements, he should be careful not to drift into Gandhism. There was a great deal of impatience in the party against elements in its ranks which seemed to veer towards the Congress type of revolution.

After a few months, he felt that considerable spade work had been done by his writings for his work in the field and he decided to resume his work precisely where he had left off eight years earlier. And so, one day gently taking leave of Nani and Jhoolu, he entrained for Madras.

Chandru proceeded cautiously by addressing meetings

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of students in different places where his reputation as a rising political figure had preceded him. Slowly, he propounded his doctrine of human dignity and the new humanism. Avoiding jargon and speaking in simple terms, he said that schools and colleges symbolised the doctrine of equal opportunity. Was it not their duty to take this doctrine forward to other sections of society which did not enjoy the advantage they had? He called for what he called "Students Voluntary Service" — groups who would go, on leaving school or college, to the dwellings of factory workers and peasants and help them to learn to read and write.

His projections of the scheme attracted a growing number of volunteers as he toured from town to town and formed students associations with the help of popular local students. There was a momentary check when he had some letters from party men saying that he was not recruiting workers for the party, but seemed to be building groups who would tend to 'drift'. Chandru was greatly perturbed since, if any such controversy developed in public, the attention of those coming forward to join in what he presented as 'non-political' work would be diverted and political schisms might develop. He wrote to his critics that they must remember that he was keeping away from communist bodies but, in the process, effectively keeping off Congress and other bourgeois politicians from the field.

He was proved right soon because, finding how students were rallying to his appeal, Congress party men began to attack Chandru and his workers. The result was the latter began retaliating against the Congress critics and there was a big fillip to the youth movement which began to drift inevitably towards his group. He told the students that they were not involved in any political work and any such suggestion would bring the wrath of powerful vested interests. Without presuming to form any party, they should simply call their organisation Students' Voluntary Service and groups of workers would be called SVS groups.

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He moved on to the plantations where workers he had earlier met rallied to hear him. Without precipitating any crisis, Chandru put it to them that the plantations would be nothing without them and their labour and so, substantially, they should take it that the plantations belonged to them. Some managers hailed Chandru's speeches with relief in the hope that he was arguing for earnest and devoted hard work. This was no doubt correct in a sense, but Chandru's deeper aim was to din into the minds of the workers that the plantations did belong to them and they should wait for the time they could take control of them.

He did not regard this work as anything more than an experiment but felt assured that it would work and he had to give his report to the party. Publicity about their activities, he felt, would be a double-edged weapon for, while it might attract other workers, it could also warn the financial interests behind these huge profit-making enterprises about the dangers of organised expropriation by the workers' unions.

Thinned, darkened and bedraggled, when Chandru reached Cochin to take the train for Bombay, he was very different from the brown Englishman who had landed in India the previous year. But he was also toughened by all that he had passed through and it was a thrilling experience for him to be garlanded and cheered by thousands of workers even though he had no official position in their unions.

At Madras, he learnt that SVS groups had begun their activity and a number of them had moved into the rural areas and organised small teaching and health groups. They had gained a foothold among the railway workers who were already organised and now welcomed the student teachers to help their children and women.

This was the first time Chandru was getting some rest and he wrote brief letters to Nani and Jhoolu giving an outline of his activities. He advised them to reply to him c/o Dhame in Bombay.

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Chandru came with great enthusiasm to Bombay and went direct to Dhame who put him immediately in touch with the President. He found the leader in a harassed state who confessed to the young enthusiast how his party comrades were now set on the war path and how people like him, who wanted to move cautiously on the political front, were on the way out. Regarding Chandru's own work, the President said that several party men of the emerging revolutionary group admired his talents, but viewed it as a matter for concern that Chandru was creating a paralled organisation without political affiliations and this might jeopardise the long-term interests of the party.

Chandru explained to him that the result of his work would be exactly the opposite. Provided the leadership of the movement was in the right hands and the party set forth its objectives correctly, why should there be a gulf between them? If trade unions got mixed up with political parties, he argued, the workers would move towards that party which would deliver the goods for them — in other words, the party in power. With a bourgeois party in power, it would be tragic if the labour unions got involved in politics because the workers were just beginning to be aware of their interests and, at the moment, their preoccupation was with better wages and service conditions. It would take at least two decades and a mass of workers like him to bring to the masses the social objectives as distinguished from the power objectives of the political parties.

Just as the President feared, there was a devastating attack on Chandru's project when the party next met at Bombay. His critics came out openly and declared that Chandru's failure to give the party flag to his working groups signified open disloyalty to the party.

Chandru was extremely angry and he declared without hesitation: "I do not want that our revolution should begin at the ringing of a bell in Bombay or Calcutta, for the simple reason that men who issue the order do not, and as matters

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stand would not, know whether workers in the distant regions can effectively start an uprising. This is precisely what I have opposed and here lies the difference between my point of view and yours. I want the uprising, or whatever you call it, to develop from below, from among the peasants and workers, and you want it to start with a command from the G.H.Q. It does not work, comrades, and it won't, for several good long years until many like you and me forget our politics and go and live among these people and get them ready, shall we say, for the liberation?

"Very well, let us see now," he continued. "We enrol them as members of our party and make these unions affiliated to our party with all its paraphernalia. It is not difficult. It is quite easy in fact. But, the testing time will come when they start their demands and fail to get what they want. They would straight march into any political party which would get them what they want.

"The philosophy and the objectives I have placed before them are quite different. I have not told them about wages, hours, etc. I have told them that these huge profit-making institutions were their products and, consequently, they belonged to them. They should own them and, for this purpose, they should have control over them, until at an opportune moment, they take possession of them. My dear comrades, the logic is very simple. If you feel your wealth is with someone else, you are anxious to get it as quickly as possible. But if you know that it is in your hands and can never escape you, you will be in no hurry to take any chance of losing it in a fight. This is what I want to tell them and they understand it.

"If you feel, I am pursuing a wrong track, I am willing to withdraw and give up the game. But if you feel the strategy is worth trying, I shall continue."

Protracted discussions followed, sometimes angry and sometimes conciliatory, until Chandru offered to put their

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formula to test. It was agreed that they should choose a big establishment where a large number of workers were employed and organise them under the party flag. He said he would lead two or three experienced party nominees to this centre and attempt to form an organisation on party lines. After considering various suggestions, the Capital Textile Mills in Delhi was chosen for the experiment and Chandru was introduced to three party militants who would be his comrades.

Chandru decided to have a short holiday with Nani and Jhoolu before embarking on this new project. He had received some letters from them which Dhame gave him. He was greatly moved to read them. Nani's letters were tearful and, in one, she asked whether this could be the fate of a truly married woman. Jhoolu's letters were full of the Jyoti spirit. He was getting on to seven and wrote a steady hand. Nani had apparently won him over completely and he called her 'Nani mummy'. His letters reflected a love of life and an eye for anything out of the ordinary which were Jyoti's characteristic traits. In one of her letters, Nani had mentioned that Charu had now a daughter. They had decided to call her 'Sundari', whom both she and Moorthy loved.

When Chandru went to inform his programme and take leave of Dhame, the latter told him the big news that 'the new fellows' had started an adventure in certain parts of Hyderabad State called Telangana, bordering the Madras Province. They had apparently moved in with lots of arms which they had collected during the war, and massacred some landlords and their families and brought cultivable lands under what they called 'collective ownership' First reports, which he had received from his sources, had spoken of 'dramatic successes'. They were now 'liberating' lands from the big landlords and were encountering little opposition. Dhame also warned him that the position of his honourable and friendly leader was in great danger and he might be pushed away any moment.

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Chandru was shocked and grieved, but declared that it was none of his business now and he would watch developments with detachment like any other student of public affairs. In the final analysis, Chandru told Dhame: "Dear Vinay, this over-hasty 'uprising', as they call it, is going to end in disaster and prove my point."

Chandru's one week in Calcutta brought memories of his early days in London with Jyoti. It was inevitable that memories of Jyoti kept coming up because his mind was now full of his politics and subconsciously he kept searching for the friend who read and echoed his thoughts and stimulatingly reacted to them. It was, therefore, a kind of twin life he led in Calcutta. Nani was heavy-hearted these days because she knew he would be going away again soon. Jhoolu too sensed the heaviness in the air and Chandru began to notice that his politics was breaking up his family bonds.

As the days went by, Nani became more and more desperate. "I am not clever like Jyoti to find reasons to make you stay," she said clinging to his hand. "But you are so much changed. You look thin and tired. You are pale and your eyes are weak as if you are ill and then your mind is always away. I feel as if there is something seriously wrong. Are you ill, my dearest, most beloved master and husband?" she whispered. "Something tells me that all is not well. I am so frightened."

"Nani, I am quite well. I am perhaps a little tired. That is all," Chandru assured her. "It is true my recent tours and the work I have been engaged in do keep me thinking of them." Holding her close to him, he gently told her: "Both you and Jhoolu are my own personal life. I long for you all the time and I haven't the heart to leave Jhoolu and go away. I do hope I can come back soon."

While arranging his essential requirements for the journey and putting away unwanted things, Nani asked him

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about a small trunk which had come with the luggage from Bombay. Chandru smiled when she showed him the trunk.

"Nani," he said, "this trunk takes me to my early boyhood. It contains all kinds of a young boy's treasures and also . . .", he paused. He took hold of the bunch of keys and opened it. "You may look into these when you have leisure if you want to know what a crazy fellow I was. There is also a diary but I have no secrets from you and you can read it. This," he said, taking a small box wrapped in a velvet cloth, "is something very precious. This is kept for Sundari. It is a present I gave her long ago, but she forgot to take it. Actually, it belongs to her and has to be handed to her some day. Keep all these my very personal things safe. Even Jyoti has not seen them as I left the box in Bombay when I went to Moscow. Now, they belong to you and me." Nani would not leave him that night and she slept with her arms round him.

Taking leave of them fondly, Chandru left for Delhi the next morning. But the separation from them affected him more than ever before as his train sped towards Delhi and his new mission. The picture of Nani and Jhoolu waving to him with their faces covered by tears kept on coming to him until he dozed off.

Once in Delhi, his days seemed to run into one another. There were three over-active party workers who were anxious to do something in a hurry and Chandru had to warn them that he would have no alternative but to return to Bombay unless they listened to him and acted cautiously. They had some contacts with a few union workers of the Capital Textile Mills. They invited groups of them and Chandru spoke to them about the new objectives of the party. This time Chandru spoke of the party line though the organisational work he sought to undertake was the same. "If your union, which is very strong, with your political awareness, can put up a stand and fight, the management must yield ultimately."

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It took a fortnight to build these contacts and Chandru and his friends participated in one of their meetings. Chandru stuck to his line that every industrial unit belonged to the workers at all levels and it was nobody's property. Their aim should, therefore, be not to gain a few demands but make it clear to the management that future negotiations on terms of work and wages must be based on this concept.

His comrades were happy when Chandru said that this was the line the party wanted to take in the case of every industrial establishment. He hoped that they would line up with the party. The response was quite satisfactory and, in a few weeks' time, a big rally was organised in which, for the first time, the C.T.M. Workers' Union raised the question of not wages but part-ownership and hoisted the hammer and sickle flag.

The proprietors, who were locally very influential with the Government, were greatly alarmed. The result was, hasty consultations took place and some Congress-sponsored union leaders called some of their men and formulated their charter of demands. In agreement with the proprietors, the government unheld the Congress Union's demands and there was a landslide jump from the Communist Union to the Congress Union. Chandru's co-workers in their frustration became violent and there were big group fights with lathis and knives and they were arrested for forming an unlawful assembly and rioting. Chandru himself escaped being taken into custody as he had disagreed with them in their plan to launch a violent campaign without the permission of the headquarters and kept to his hotel. But, two days later, the police came to his lodge and served an order on him. It was issued from the Office of the Deputy Commissioner and Chandru read:

"Dr. V. Chandrasekhar who has been engaged in unlawful activities in association with some other political agitators arrested for acts of violence, is hereby externed from the territorial limits of the Delhi Municipal Committee

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including the city limits of New Delhi. Within 48 hours of the receipt of this Order, the said Dr. Chandrasekhar is required to leave the above defined area, failing which he will be prosecuted for engaging in activities prejudicial to law and order in the said territories.

V. RAGHAVAN, I.C.S.
Deputy Commissioner, Delhi."

Chandru was greatly amused to read this communication. "The wheel has come full circle, my friend," he murmured. When the Police Officer who served the Order, asked whether he said something, Chandru said that he was talking to himself and gave the required assurance of compliance. As the experiment planned by his colleagues on the special committee was now over, he promptly left Delhi, mentally waving farewell to his old friend, Raghu, who had been primarily responsible for his career in politics and was now waving the flag he once wanted to burn.

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CHAPTER 25

The first news Dhame gave Chandru on arrival in Bombay was that the 'action group' in Hyderabad had kidnapped his friend Rajaraman of the I.C.S.

"What do you mean?" Chandru asked unable to understand. "Kidnapped? Sundari's husband?"

"Yes, dear Chandru," Dhame replied calmly. "The same Rajaraman."

"Why him of all people?" Chandru asked.

"It is not a long story," Dhame continued. "You remember I told you these people had started an 'uprising' in some parts of Hyderabad bordering on the Madras State. They were able to rouse a lot of mass fury. But the landlords had the best of it. They managed to bring in a big posse of armed police kept by the Nizam and they got half a dozen of our men.

"It happened this way. Our people, finding themselves beaten, had fled and crossed into the neighbouring Kurnool District in British India which is outside Nizam's territory. They thought they had escaped and were relaxing when the Nizam's police made a swoop and simply took them away. This was illegal as the Nizam's police had no right to enter British Indian territory which Kurnool is, being a part of Madras Province, without the permission of the British Indian authorities. Thereupon, some of our leaders rushed to Rajaraman, who is the Collector and District Magistrate of Kurnool, and complained against the Nizam's police. He told them that what the Nizam's police had done was illegal, but he could not order direct police action to retaliate, as Hyderabad was a sovereign State. He could only report the incident to the Central Government and there was

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a procedure for action in such cases through the British Resident in Hyderabad. They began to abuse him and Rajaraman told them that, for their crimes, they were certainly bound to be arrested. What did it matter whether it was by the Nizam's police or the Kurnool police? The fact was he did not take them seriously though what he said was the correct legal position.

"That night, our fellows organised a lightning raid, rushed to the Collector's bungalow, seized him physically, put him in a car and drove away. A neat job. He is now our prisoner in one of our camps."

Chandru was shocked and pained and asked:

"What about his wife?"

"She was in Madras, it seems, and so she escaped."

"What do they expect to gain?"

"Well, they have sent a note to the Police Superintendent in Hyderabad that he would be released if the arrested Communists were set free."

"How will the Superintendent of the Nizam's police be interested in getting the Collector of Kurnool released? He is not a Nizam's officer, but an official of British India," Chandru argued.

"But our boys say 'you have our men and we have your Collector. Let us make a deal. If you want the Collector, release our men,'" Dhame said. "The Nizam's police are laughing. They have started torturing our men who have given some clues already regarding our camps in that area. Now we are re-grouping in different places. Our leaders have gone underground."

"Very tragic," Chandru said. "This is meaningless bestiality. I shall speak to the boss about it."

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"Which boss, the one that is coming or the one that is going?"

"My friend, of course," replied Chandru.

"Well, he is the outgoing boss. He is leader now only in name. In any case, nobody takes orders from him," Dhame said. "Apart from that, they will ask, 'how are you interested?' "

"You are right, Vinay," Chandru said sadly "But I am sorry for Sundari."

"But you have more immediate things to worry about," Dhame continued. "They are much upset about your campaign in Delhi. They argue that you should also have got arrested — for the sake of the party."

Chandru laughed: "I went to prove a point. Was it not made clear?"

"Who thinks of those things?" Dhame said. "They are convinced that it is time to show our strength and we must be up and about."

"Yes, we saw the result in Delhi — 'up and about', my foot!" Chandru said bitterly. "If we had gone about quietly and slowly, we could have got all those thousands of men with us. What we should do now is exactly not to precipitate a confrontation."

It was two days later that the party met and he was called to attend and give his report. His fellow members of the Committee had already told him that the general view was that he had bungled. His old leader was the only one who smiled at him as he entered, though the others obviously knew him but kept mum. Instead of his seat at the head of the table, the President had been relegated to a side though he was still nominally the President. The new leader,

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whom Chandru did not know, made a virulent attack on those party men who had betrayed the party by kowtowing to the bourgeoise. He said that the uprising in Telangana had woken up the people and if such uprisings could be organised in a few other places, there would be a state-wide revolution.

He referred to the Kurnool incident and pointed out that a few more such 'captures' would show the people which way the land lay. "We can achieve nothing unless we are ready to shed some blood."

Nobody made any comment, but some comrades occasionally clapped. There were several speeches in similar terms, while the President was the only member who was not called upon to speak. At the end of it, an agreed statement, apparently previously prepared, was read and Chandru was wondering whether they took any notice of him when the new leader announced that the party had a nasty setback in Delhi and called upon Chandru to give his report.

He was in an extremely angry mood. The kidnapping of Rajaraman, his being sent to Delhi and the utter folly of starting on violence when both the workers and peasants were against it and the masses were veering towards the Congress as the saviours of the country from foreign domination, all had convinced him that the party was in for another disaster on the pattern of the People's war.

Chandru gave a matter-of-fact report on what happened in Delhi and how party activists who could have done some useful spade work among workers were now in jail to be immobilised for some years.

"If you had courted arrest with them, you would have done better by your party," a voice shouted.

"I beg to differ," Chandru said politely instead of shouting back. "I think I am serving the party better by telling some sober words."

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Then he gave a background of the work of the Special Committee and how the mission to Delhi was organised and how events had proved that he had been right. After taking the permission of the chair to put forward his points, Chandru went into his political scheme for a revolution whose aim was the achievement of true communism.

"We cannot stop this revolution," he declared raising his voice. "But we will defeat it if we go about it through over-hasty short-cuts. Sacrifices will have to be made, but they should be for the right cause. I am saying this because I am interested in the party."

"Of which you don't want to become a member!" a member shouted.

"And I want more people like me to work for the party without being members, more people like me dedicated to the true communist revolution," Chandru declared. "I am not a ridiculous soldier to fight windmills, but I want to be one to start the wind which will make windmills work."

A fierce-looking elderly man got up, raising his fist. "You must be an awfully opinionated pup to tell veterans like us what we should do or not do. You had better listen to us or get out."

The leader called for order and declared that they did not want brilliant and devoted young men to be driven from the party. "Comrade Chandrasekhar has a point which is interesting. Though young, many of us know that he has won considerable distinction by his effective public activity. We do not want such young men in the party to be heckled and hunted, for, as he has said, a revolution is not an overnight affair. It has to be patiently striven for."

He asked Chandru to sit down and explained that young people like him should know that the party could not miss

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opportunities like the present to hit out and this was the decision of the party. Any dissenting voice would defeat the common objective.

"We must all work under the party flag so that the party gains from our labours."

"May I say a word, Comrade," Chandru interrupted. "Our party exercises a discipline and it is right that it should. The trouble arises when there is a gap between the immediate and the long-term objectives. I say I stand for the long-term objective. There are some comrades who say that the short-term objective is more important. We can afford to lose a battle but we cannot afford to lose the war."

"That does not apply here. Party decisions must prevail," the leader declared.

"But not necessarily endangering the final objective," Chandru said.

"I am afraid our young comrade is wrong," the leader said resuming his address. "I shall ask him to proceed to Telangana straightaway and see that there is no gulf, as he says, between long-term and short-term objectives. We are indeed doing very well in that area. He has ability and dedication. He can see and then join the party and accept our discipline and make his valuable contribution. He has indeed much to give. He is young, he has mass appeal, he has ability and dedication. I request Comrade Chandrasekhar to build himself up and serve the party rather than fritter away his enormous energies in day-dreams.

"A number of our men are now going to Telangana. I suggest that he joins them. He will meet an old friend, who did the party's preliminary work in these parts. He can see how men in the party like him have done excellent work. After seeing our good work in Telangana, I am sure he will come to us, an enthusiastic party man."

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One of the men later contacted Chandru and told him that they were not to take a lot of luggage as they would have to drift quite a bit before reaching their destination.

When Chandru met Dhame the next morning, the latter asked him if he had a good night. "You are looking quite fatigued," Dhame said. "I wanted to ask you even when I met you the other day. You appear to have thinned a lot and your eyes look tired. Why not see a doctor, Chandru, before you go to Telangana?"

"So, you know about that, Vinay," Chandru smiled.

"Yes, I was there. You didn't see me," Dhame said.

"I am glad you were there. It saves me a lot of talking. What do you think about it all?"

"You have a long battle, Chandru. I do see your point, but which political party will allow anyone to work from outside its discipline? They could have easily pushed you out but they want you. You are valuable to them. They want your talents, So, try to make a compromise."

"I don't know how, Vinay," Chandru said. "I had better quit. I shall go to Telangana and see. Who is the old friend he said I would meet?"

"O, that?" Dhame said. "You remember Venkat, the young man who did not talk much on that day at the Youth Conference before you went abroad. He is the big guy behind the Telengana uprising. But I heard whispers that he is being pushed out as he has a more powerful hold on the peasants than the leaders who go from here. They don't like it. They think that he is building himself up."

"There you are, Vinay. You have said it," Chandru exclaimed. "They want their public image — a typical politi-

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cian's ambition. It won't work, Vinay, it won't. I don't fit into this camp."

"Stoop to conquer, Chandru," said Dhame. "Don't be rash and lose your way in the woods."

"My way is not clear, I am really confused," Chandru said. He leaned against the almirah and stretched his legs. Dhame looked at him and said quietly: "Come, let us go to a doctor — just for a check-up."

"Don't be silly," Chandru laughed. "I am all right."

"There is no harm in seeing a doctor," Dhame persisted and dragged a reluctant Chandru to a doctor who was also a friend.

The doctor saw him and said: "You are awfully anaemic. I think you should have your blood tested. You must enter a hospital."

"I am going on a tour, doctor," Chandru said. "Can't we wait till I come back?" Chandru asked.

"Frankly, I feel it is not good to delay. You have to make up your mind."

Dhame looked perplexed and harassed. "You do look ill, Chandru. The doctor is right. Telangana can wait."

Chandru allayed his fears saying that nobody could have stood the strenuous work of the last few days as well as he had done. "I have still got a lot of staying power," he told Dhame and left.

Dhame did not say anything. But he seemed greatly concerned.

That night Chandru wrote letters to Nani, Jhoolu and Charu, saying that he was starting on an exciting adventure

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and would write to them on his return. His letters were full of tenderness, for these were the three people who filled his heart, and, if he ever prayed, he prayed for them. He gave his love to Moorthy and his kisses to little Sundari.

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CHAPTER 26

It was nearly ten o'clock in the night and Dhame was falling off to sleep when he heard somebody knock on his door. He had to come down the stairs to open the door and, as he was hesitating, the knocks were repeated.

He went down at last switching on the lights and opened the door. The caller was a tall, well-built, well-dressed young man. Before Dhame could say anything, he stepped in saying:

"I am Venkat. Let us go in and talk."

"Why this disguise?" Dhame exclaimed.

"Otherwise, I could not have reached here. You know our people are on the run."

As they went up to Dhame's room and sat, Venkat said briefly: "Chandru is dead."

Dhame sat in stunned silence. He waited for Venkat to continue.

"You know he joined us in Telangana. I thought he was not looking well, but he said he would pick up in the dry climate and open air life which would be his lot along with ours. But he did not pick up. Thanks to the Party bosses who had ruined our peaceful work of seven years, the police were swooping on us everywhere and we were continuously on the run. Poor Chandru could not keep pace, but he kept on until one day, he just fainted.

"We revived him with palmirah fruits, but he had become so weak he could not even walk without help. Then he asked us to drop him and go along and he would find

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his way to some hospital. 'Tell everything to Dhame,' he told me. I don't know what he meant, but here I am by his bidding to tell you everything."

Dhame got up, took his handkerchief and wiped his face pale with shock. Then, he slowly sat down again.

"We knew leaving him there would simply mean leaving him to die. So, we took him to the Kurnool District Hospital at dead of night when no one was watching and left him on the veranda and ran for our lives. He was unconcious. There was no place where we could hide as villagers thought we had betrayed them and that we were members of the C.P.I. which had roused the wrath of the police. Lord, Vinay, it was just hell.

"While others fled, I decided to stay on in Kurnool to keep a watch on Chandru. I got my hair cut and had a clean shave. There was a party man masquerading there as a salesman. He is a biggish fellow and I got his suit which fitted me fairly well. By a lucky chance, I met an elderly man whose wife was a nurse in the hospital. He was a clerk in the Municipal office and took pity on me as I pretended to be desperately looking for a job. I got close to the old couple and thus kept in touch with what was going on in the hospital through the kindly nurse. My story is thus complete but I shall tell it briefly.

"The most dramatic thing which happened was that the Hyderabad police came for their search of hospitals for wounded terrorists. They saw Chandru, but said that he could not be one of their wanted men as the people they were after were hefty, wild, big fellows. This man was on his death bed and they were not interested even in questioning him. But the intrusion of the Hyderabad police came to the notice of the Collector, Rajaraman, and he came personally to enquire. Then he saw Chandru.

"He recognised him and was deeply shocked. Chandru was unconscious and, on his orders, he was shifted to the

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V.I.P. room. He was thereafter given special attention. Several blood transfusions were given until, four days later, he gained consciousness. On hearing about his condition from the nurse, the repeated blood transfusions and the continuing low haemoglobin, Chandru told the nurse that he would not survive as he suspected he was suffering from a disease called Aplastic Anaemia about which he had heard while he was in England. Anyway, since a specialist had been sent for by Rajaraman from the big hospital in Hyderabad, they waited for his verdict.

"Chandru could not speak to the doctor as he lapsed into unconsciousness every now and then, but his fears were proved right. Chandru guessed this from Rajaraman's great agitation. He was in and out of the hospital and often sat by the bed for hours waiting for Chandru to open his eyes. Once when he did so, Chandru saw him and smiled in recognition. Then he mumbled to Rajaraman whether he could send for his cousin Sundari. He would like to see her once, he said, before he slept away.

"The sister said that Rajaraman was greatly moved somehow, whenever he spoke to Chandru and he did have some talk with him. Once, it seems, the nurse heard him saying: 'I am terribly sorry. Chandru, I misunderstood you. I read your books only now. Oh, how miserably mistaken I was.' They did not know whether Chandru heard him as his eyes were closed, but, afterwards, the nurse heard him tell Rajaraman: 'Raja, I leave my wife and son in your and Sundari's charge. Please take care of them.' The nurse did not hear what they talked afterwards. But no one who knew how formal and austere the Collector was, could believe he could be so soft and kind.

"When no one else was present, Chandru dictated to the nurse two letters, one to his wife and the other to his son and asked her to read what she had written and signed them himself. They were really letters of farewell, but couched wisely to give them confidence. The nurse said he

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got a promise from her not to inform his wife. 'When they saw me last, I was in good health and I want them to keep that picture of me in their mind and not that of a sick man in a hospital.' He got her to promise this as a Christian. Apparently, he had got the same promise from the Collector.

"The most poignant part of the story was the arrival of the Collector's wife from Madras. When she first saw Chandru, she collapsed. Fortunately, he was unconscious then. She was taken out and, after she revived, it was a job for her to get control over herself. Finally, when she entered the room, her face was bloated with weeping but she was calm. Chandru was conscious but extremely weak. She sat near him on the bed and bent down to hear what he was saying. The nurse was coming and going as she had been asked to keep constant check on his pulse and once she heard him tell the madame 'we have shared a life' and then pause for several minutes and then, 'You must be a mother to Nani and Jhoolu,' and then after several minutes he opened his eyes and smiled and murmured "My beloved ... cousin ... Sundari ... Goodbye."

"That was all. He never regained consciousness again. He was in coma for three days and, on the day his wife and son reached Kurnool, Chandru's body was consigned to the flames, Rajaraman attending to the formalities."

As Dhame sat listening silently, Venkat continued: "I knew Chandru had told something in confidence to Rajaraman and I had to know exactly what it was if it would interest us. I decided to cast discretion to the winds and went and saw Rajaraman and identified myself to him. He had just come back after the cremation.

"When I mentioned my name, he could have got me arrested then and there, but he did not. He said: "I know you. You stood by Chandru when he made his fateful decision to save me."

"What happened? I don't understand," Dhame said.

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"Yes, that is very important. I must tell you about that," Venkat replied. "At a place near Nalgonda, the new boss met us and we got to talking late in the night. I was one with Chandru in his thesis that bringing the party's name in building up a mass movement like this would be self-defeating. Chandru and I were both against violence and terrorism and we argued that this was not necessary. Sustained work among the people would slowly but surely bring the desired result. We had violent arguments about it and at one stage, when he said I was trying to build myself up, I was about to jump on him and strangle him. But Chandru restrained me and explained to the leader patiently that the poor villagers, steeped in age-old traditions, were afraid of changes and new faces and people had to live and work with them and gain their confidence. 'If you want the emancipation of the poor, you must keep your party and power politics out.' He also told the leader the absurdity of keeping the Collector a prisoner when the Nizam's police would not lift a little finger to save him.

"Then the leader made the most brutal proposition. He said he would release Rajaraman (who, he knew, was Chandru's cousin's husband) if Chandru agreed to join the party. I shouted at him that this was sheer blackmail. Chandru realised that yielding to this demand would be giving up the principles for which he had fought so long in the party. I was watching closely. Grief and depression filled his face. He looked at the leader and said: 'Yes, please release him. I shall sign for the party.'

"Believe me, Vinay, I was stunned, mortified. What had the fellow done? Then I looked at his face. I got the message. In the final analysis, he had opted for the heart. There was something about Chandru, you know, you cannot explain. Hear him talk — he wraps up his philosophy in love. It was perhaps his simplicity, his honesty or sincerity. No one could say 'no' to him. When the leader turned to me and asked: 'What about you?' I simply replied: 'I shall do what Chandru does.' Chandru looked at me and smiled.

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It was the saddest smile I had seen in my life. The poor fellow evidently knew what I was doing. But Chandru won — in a way. The leader told us he would get Rajaraman released and would not insist on Chandru joining the party. 'I shall treat him as a good non-conforming Communist.

"The interesting part of it was that Rajaraman, who had been kept in an adjoining room, heard everything. No one knew he was there and when the leader knew about it, he was terribly upset. There was nothing to be done. Rajaraman had been in detention for over ten days and when he was brought he was wearing the same night shirt and pyjamas in which he had been taken and was unshaven and looked sick. He did not look one side or the other and walked up to the jeep which had been kept waiting to take him on the leader's orders to the border to be released.

"Now, to the point. I told Rajaraman about Chandru's last request and asked him whether he had to tell me anything to be conveyed to you. His reply was not important but interesting. 'Chandru did not tell me anything,' Rajaraman said. 'It was I who did the talking. I had to for my own relief. I had for long laughed at him and could not understand why my wife admired him so much. After what happened at Nalgonda, I knew that she was right and I was wrong. Nobody could help loving him. I read his books again. It was obvious he was struggling, but what a struggle! If he had lived, he would have perhaps led the biggest social revolution in history. I had only one message for him. It was an atonement. He merely smiled when I said that, for he was nearly gone then. I told him I was quitting the I.C.S., the core of the bureaucracy he had so assiduously fought. He closed his eyes then and I knew he was beyond anyone's reach.'

"When I was leaving Rajaraman's house, I saw the Collector's wife holding Chandru's son, with one arm round a young woman who looked dazed, evidently Chandru's wife. I did not stop. I felt funny, like a mother's kid after

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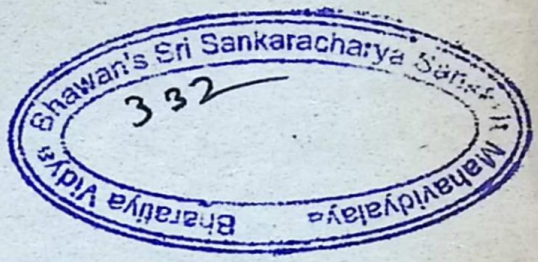
years and years. That was the end. I came here straight to tell everything to you as Chandru wanted."

Venkat got up and, characteristically, without a word of formal leave-taking, left. Dhame sat unmoved for several minutes in that gloomy silence. Then, he slowly got up and took some old letters from his drawer and sat looking at one of them for a long time. Then he stuffed the letters in his pockets and slowly walked out, without putting off the lights, without locking the doors which were wide open as he walked away. No one saw Vinayak Ram Dhame again.



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